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WESLEY'S DEVELOPMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP

BY

ABRAHAM NORIHITO IWAGAMI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (THEOLOGY)

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

1995

Approved by *J. O. Malley*  
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Date *August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1995*

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## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Introduction

Spiritual growth is one of the main concerns for every Christian. How can we become Christlike? To this end, Christian discipline is necessary. In Church history, there have been several discipleship movements, such as Monasticism, Pietism and Methodism, etc. In these movements, Methodism emphasized on a discipleship as well as other movements. Wesley was the founder of Methodism. He practiced discipleship seriously throughout his life, and he changed England in the eighteenth century. For Wesley, Christianity was not merely teaching, but a dynamic movement. In this movement, he used discipleship as a means of practice. There is so much theological research about Wesley but not much about his practical teaching. Even though theology is the foundation of practice, we cannot ignore practice as well as theology. Hence, the writer will research both Wesley's theological foundation of discipleship and his practice of discipleship.

Thesis Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine Wesley's theology and practice of discipleship. For this purpose, there are several questions that follow; (1) What is the background of Wesley's understanding of discipleship? (2) What is the relationship between Oxford Methodism and later Methodism in terms of discipleship? (3) How did the Moravian

Church influence Wesley's discipleship? (4) How did Wesley organize his own discipleship work as his pastoral care?

### Review of the Literature

This study is limited to John Wesley's idea of discipleship which was developed during his lifetime. Of the available books on Wesley and his discipleship, the following have been selected as most significant in the preparation for, and study of, the topic.

The book which served as the most comprehensive work about Wesley's life and theology was Mitsuru Fujimoto's Theology of John Wesley.<sup>1</sup> This book gave me a general background and understanding about John Wesley. It seems to offer a comprehensive treatment of Wesley's life and his theology. It includes Wesley's text, selected by the author, in every chapter. This confirms the author's arguments presented in this book.

One of the purposes of this thesis is to examine the development of Wesley's idea of discipleship. My one assumption is that Wesley integrated several Christian traditions of discipleship. Frank Baker's John Wesley and the Church of England is a classic book about John Wesley. He portrayed John Wesley as an Anglican person who tried to reform the Anglican Church. In this context, Baker interpreted Wesley's discipleship as his pastoral care system.<sup>2</sup> This understanding becomes the basis of my

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<sup>1</sup> Mitsuru Samuel Fujimoto, Wesley's Theology, (Tokyo: Evangelical Publishing Association, 1990).

understanding of Wesley's discipleship groups. On the other hand, Martin Schmidt's three volumes, John Wesley: Theological Biography, investigated the relationship between John Wesley and Moravian Movement as German Pietism.<sup>3</sup> In volume one, Schmidt traces the Moravian influence on Wesley before his Aldersgate experience. Then, he examined Wesley's stay in Germany. After that the author compared the similarities and the differences of discipleship between Methodists and Moravians. His emphasis is on the differences more than the similarities in volume two. These volumes gave me the best understanding of how the German Pietism influenced Wesley's discipleship and how Wesley made his discipleship uniquely based on his theology. Robert C. Monk's John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage offers information about how Puritanism influenced Wesley throughout his life. This book indicates that Wesley used Puritan writing constantly. In chapter five, the author dealt with the Christian life of Wesley. This chapter showed me how Puritanism influenced Wesley's view of the Christian life. The author pointed out that Wesley clearly depended on the Puritan tradition in several teachings relative to Christian living in both teaching and practice.<sup>4</sup> Ted A. Campbell's

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Schmidt, John Wesley: A Theological Biography, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Robert C. Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 241.

John Wesley and Christian Antiquity examines Wesley's stress on the early Christian practice. The author mentions that Wesley called on ancient Christianity for precedents or confirmations for Methodist institutions.<sup>5</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater's Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism investigates how Methodism came out of the Religious Society in Eighteenth Century England and what were the decisive points of early Methodism from the Church of England.<sup>6</sup> These books gave me a good understanding of the relationship between Wesley and Christian traditions.

Now is the time to turn my eye toward Wesley himself. The writer needs a comprehensive view of Wesley in the context of his theology. Harald Lindström's Wesley and Sanctification interpreted Wesley's theology of Sanctification.<sup>7</sup> Lindström's understanding of Wesley is important for us, because he indicated that Wesley's soteriology involves the theology of justification by faith from Protestantism and the theology of sanctification from the Catholic tradition. This integration of justification and sanctification is the decisive point in the theology of Wesley. In the context of sanctification, discipleship has a

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<sup>5</sup>Ted W. Campbell, John Wesley and Christian Antiquity, (Nashville: Kingwood Books, 1991), 86.

<sup>6</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, Mirror and Memory: Reflection on Early Methodism, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Harald Lindström, Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the doctrine of salvation, (Wilmore: Francis Asbury Publishing, 1980).

strong meaning in the Christian life. This understanding of sanctification leads us to the study of good works and faith. Stephen Gunter's The Limits of 'Love Divine' examined how Wesley made distinctions from enthusiasm or perfectionism and Antinomianism.<sup>8</sup> Samuel M. Fujimoto's dissertation Wesley's Good Works traced this problem chronologically. The author made distinctions between the early Wesley, the middle Wesley and the late Wesley according to Outler's distinctions. He examined Wesley's theological features in these times. Especially, he concentrated on Wesley's idea of good works. This idea of good works is one of the bases of Wesley's discipleship. In this relationship, Fujimoto's dissertation is very useful for my topic concerning the theology of grace and good works. Aldersgate Reconsidered is an edited book about Wesley's Aldersgate experience. In this book, several authors tried to reinterpret Wesley's conversion experience at Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. This experience was one of the most crucial experiences of his life.<sup>9</sup> One article in this book, written by David Watson, "Aldersgate and the general rules" offers a comprehensive idea of discipleship in the context of the Christian experience; the conversion experience as acceptance of God's grace leads to Christian discipleship in Wesley's concept of salvation.

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<sup>8</sup> W. Stephen Gunter, The Limits of 'Love Divine', (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Randy L. Maddox, ed., Aldersgate Reconsidered, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990).

Mary Alice Tenney's Blueprint for a Christian World, more than any other work, seems to offer a comprehensive understanding of Wesley's idea of the Christian life. She treated not only the theological view of the Christian life, but also the practical Christian life as a follower of Christ. She examined details of Christian life, like using treasure and time for leisure. However, this book did not talk about class meeting or small groups so much. Her examination of the Christian life as a steward is most significant for my understanding of Wesley's discipleship practice.<sup>10</sup>

Ronald G. Williams' dissertation John Wesley's Doctrine of the Church offer a comprehensive understanding of Wesley's view of the Church.<sup>11</sup> It covers basic understanding of Wesley's view of the Church over all. Wesley's small group is usually understood in the context of ecclesiolae in ecclesia -- little churches within the church. This dissertation, however, does not treat Wesley's small group so much, this dissertation is significant for my thesis.

Wesley's discipleship was conducted not only by Wesley himself, but also by class leaders as ministers. Wesley's understanding of ministry is one of the main issues of his

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Alice Tenney, Blueprint for a Christian World: An Analysis of the Wesleyan Way, (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1953).

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Gordon Williams, John Wesley's Doctrine of the Church, Ph.D., Diss., Boston University School of Theology, 1964 (Ann Arbor: UMI 1964).



understanding of discipleship. Concerning Wesley's view of ministry, there is one book and one dissertation. One is John Nelson Russell Score II's Ph. D. dissertation A Study of the Concept of the Ministry in the Thought of John Wesley.<sup>12</sup> The other is A. B. Lawson's John Wesley and the Christian Ministry.<sup>13</sup> These two offer good arguments about Wesley's thought of ministry. His understanding of ministry includes the leadership of discipleship.

Henry H. Knight III's The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace offers a good argument about Wesley's concept of the means of grace.<sup>14</sup> Knight treats the Christian life as discipleship using the means of grace in his book. He defined Wesley's small group as the prudential means of grace within the context of means of grace. This understanding in the context of means of grace is one good interpretation of Wesley's discipleship. However, Wesley's discipleship is more than merely means of grace.

The main theme of this thesis is Wesley's discipleship. Concerning Wesley's discipleship, there are several secondary sources. One is Howard A. Snyder's book The Radical Wesley

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<sup>12</sup> John Nelson Russel ScoreII, A Study of the Concept of the Ministry in the Thought of John Wesley, Ph.D., Diss., Duke University, 1963 (Ann Arbor: UMI 1963)

<sup>13</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and The Christian Ministry, (London: S.P.C.K.,1963).

<sup>14</sup> Henry H. Knight III, The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1992).

and Patterns for Church Renewal.<sup>15</sup> Snyder grasped the meaning and purpose of Wesley's discipleship and offered a number of good insights. He offered a comprehensive view of Wesley's discipleship in this book. Snyder treated this topic in the context of Church renewal. So, his argument is broader than my thesis topic. He did not examine the discipleship itself, but Wesley's small group system as a church renewal system. On the other hand, David L. Watson's book The Early Methodist Class Meeting concentrated on Wesley's class meeting which is one of Wesley's discipleship group. Watson treated this topic in the theological and historical context. His treatment of class meeting is adequate, but it is defined more narrowly than the whole view of Wesley's understanding of discipleship.<sup>16</sup>

There are two dissertations about Wesley's discipleship. One is David Michael Henderson's "John Wesley's Instructional Group." This dissertation interpreted John Wesley's small group from the view of Wesley's educational system.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation is not adequate to interpret Wesley's small group. The writer does not deny that Wesley's small group has aspects of an educational system. However, this interpretation limits Wesley's idea of discipleship in the

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<sup>15</sup> Howard A. Snyder, Radical Wesley and Patters for Church Renewal. (Grads Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> David L. Watson, Early Methodist Class Meeting, (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> David Michael Henderson, "John Wesley's Instructional Groups", (Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 1980).

education system. His discipleship has more meaning in the context of his whole theology. Another dissertation is William Walter Dean's Discipleship Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell Groups in British Methodism. This dissertation offers the best understanding of Wesley's small groups. The author defined Wesley's small group as the cell group system which is a 'unique theological synthesis of John and Charles Wesley' in the contest of ecclesiolae in ecclesia.<sup>18</sup> This dissertation covers a comprehensive view of British Methodism, including its rise and decline. His insight and thought help the writer to understand British Methodism including Wesley's discipleship.

With these related literatures which gave good insights and information, the writer began this study, considering first their interpretation and then investigating deeply into Wesley and his concept of discipleship.

#### Theoretical frame work

For this thesis, initial presuppositions are these; Wesley synthesized ideas and practices of discipleship from several traditions in Christian History. Wesley's theology is called as "Via Media." Wesley's theology itself synthesized several traditions.

The term "discipleship" includes two things: disciplined life and discipleship in small groups. These two are

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<sup>18</sup> William Walter Dean, Discipleship Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell groups in British Methodism, Ph.D. Diss., University of Iowa, 1985 (Ann Arbor: UMI 1985).

integrated in Wesley's mind. Discipleship small groups were designed for a disciplined life which emphasized a pursuit of inward holiness as the normal Christian life. So, the term "discipleship" concerns practice and theology, especially soteriology.

### Organization of the Thesis

The organization of this thesis will be in this way. In the first chapter, the writer will examine the foundation of Wesley's idea of discipleship. The first chapter will treat the background of Wesley's discipleship. The second chapter will treat his discipleship in the Oxford Methodists. In the third chapter, the writer will examine Wesley's development of Wesley's discipleship as related to the Moravian movement. How did Wesley relate to the Moravian movement? How did he separate from the Moravian movement and organize his own discipleship groups? In the fourth chapter, the writer will examine his small group discipleship in his pastoral care. In this section, Wesley's discipleship will be treated as cell group: Society, Band and Class meetings. Finally, theological and historical significance of Wesley's discipleship will be examined.

## CHAPTER 2

## The Background of Wesley's Understanding of Discipleship

John Wesley's family discipleship in Epworth

John Wesley practiced discipleship throughout his life, not only in discipleship groups, but in his own disciplined life-style. The foundation for his ideas and practice of discipleship was developed through his experiences. His practices shaped his theology of discipleship. These two are interwoven. However, Wesley's entrance of his discipleship of life was not based on his own decision. The beginning of his discipleship came from his family in Epworth.

The discipline in the Wesley family depended on Mrs. Susannah Wesley. She disciplined her children strictly. Her motivation was not only as a mother of her children, but also as a servant of God.<sup>19</sup> Her responsibilities in her family were dedicated to God. The household work was not merely "work" in her mind. This understanding of Mrs. Wesley as being a servant of God led to an accountable lifestyle. John Wesley received this idea from his mother. In the house, the children were strictly disciplined by Susannah. John Wesley

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<sup>19</sup> John Wesley inserts his mother's letter in his Journal on the date of her death. "As I am a woman, so I am also mistress of a large family. And though the superior charge of the souls contained in it lies upon you, yet, in your absence, I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my care as a talent committed to me under a trust by the great Lord of all the families both of heaven and earth. And if I am unfaithful to Him or you in neglecting to improve their talents, how shall I answer unto Him when He shall command me to render an account of my stewardship?" Nehemiah Nehemiah Curnock ed., Journal of John Wesley, vol.3, (London: Robert Culley, 1909), 32.

kept this lifestyle even during his school age where he was removed from parental oversight by going to Charterhouse.<sup>20</sup> This lifestyle is continued until his Oxford Methodists time. The disciplined lifestyle at Epworth rectory became a practical basis for Wesley's disciplined life.

Susannah's family discipline is based on her theological thought. She wrote her practice of family discipline in this way: "In order to form the minds of children, the first things to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper.... but the subjecting the will is a thing which must be done at once, and the sooner the better. ..."21

Her understanding of family discipline is based on her understanding of anthropology. The principle of this discipline is the doctrine of sin. Her understanding was that "self-will is the root of all sin and misery."<sup>22</sup> Because man is a sinner, man cannot will God's will. Children first need to learn to conquer their own will which is the root of sin and disobedience to God. This understanding is a basic principle of discipleship. Discipleship is always like a war against the self. Self-centeredness is most dangerous for children. The priority of family discipline is to conquer their own self-will. There is a sprout of good works to conquer self-will by discipline. Martin Schmidt pointed out

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<sup>20</sup> BE Works, vol.242-44. Journal dated on May 24, 1738.

<sup>21</sup> John Newton, Susannah Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism, (Epworth Press: Abingdon, n.d.), 88

<sup>22</sup> Journal of John Wesley, vol.3, 36.

that Susannah's understanding of "will" is based on the medieval mysticism of Scupoli.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Fujimoto points out that the background of this discipleship understanding includes Puritanism, Mysticism, and Anglicanism.<sup>24</sup> In this understanding, two things are emphasized. One is the battle of will in which the will of the human is always against the will of God. Another is a human responsibility to conquer his or her own will by the grace of God. The synergetic idea of the Christian life is always based on the battle of will and human responsibility. A disciplined life needs for children to conquer own self-centered will. For Susannah, disciplined life was the means for victory against his or her own will. This victory in the battle of will by God's grace became one of the ends of Wesley's discipline.

A weekly religious talk with his mother is another important aspect of John childhood discipline in his home. He spent every Thursday night with his mother.<sup>25</sup> This custom

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Schmidt, vol.1, 48-53.

<sup>24</sup> Fujimoto, 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> From the letter of Susannah Wesley to Rev. Samuel Wesley, We knew about this religious talking. "But soon after you went to London last, I light on the account of the Danish missionaries. I was, I think, never more affected with anything; I could not forbear spending a good part of that evening in praising and adoring the divine goodness for inspiring them with such ardent zeal for His glory.... I thought I might pray more for them, and might speak to those with whom I converse with more warmth of affection. I resolve to begin with my own children, in which observe the following method: I take such a proportion of time as I can spare every night to discourse with each child apart. On

probably formed spiritual openness in Wesley. After leaving home to go to school, he continued religious talking with parents through correspondence. Throughout his life, John Wesley practiced this religious talking. In later years, he recommends to parents this religious talking with their children in his sermon "On Family Religion."<sup>26</sup> This reflects his own experience of religious talk with his mother. This openness is a key factor of Wesley's discipleship. If someone closes his or her heart, there is no way to communicate and share spiritual matters. At least, Wesley practiced this religious talk as a means of spiritual openness in his childhood. In a discipleship group, this spiritual openness became crucial aspect. Wesley always gave warning against a spiritually closed heart.<sup>27</sup>

Frank Baker summarized Wesley's childhood discipline this way: "Wesley's childhood religion was based on strict obedience to the laws of God, made known by divine revelation in the Bible, by the voice of conscience, and by the confirmation of informed reasoning."<sup>28</sup> Wesley received strict discipline in his home from his parents under the

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Monday, I talk with Molly; on Tuesday with Hetty; Wednesday with Nancy; Thursday with Jacky; Friday with Patty; ;Saturday with Charles; and with Emily and Suky together on Sunday." Journal of John Wesley, vol.3, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Sermon#94, "On Family Religion" Sermon #94 BE works, vol.3, 340-41.

<sup>27</sup> "Rules of the Band Societies" BE Works, vol.9, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Baker, 22.



influence of the Church of England.<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt that this family discipleship influenced Wesley strongly, and it set a basis for him. On this basis, Wesley build up his discipleship throughout life.

#### The Discipleship Groups of Wesley's Parents

Concerning Wesley's discipleship group, there is another background besides his own family discipleship. That is his parents own discipleship movements. John Wesley himself was not much involved in this discipleship; however, there was probably still some influence on him. Both parents, Samuel and Susannah, led their own groups in Epworth. These two groups were totally different in context and setting. But the end of the groups was renewed spirituality. These two movements were not outside the church but inside the church of England.<sup>30</sup>

#### Susannah's Family Prayer Meeting

Susannah's group was basically a family prayer meeting. During her husband's absence, she took care of all the family matters including their spirituality. As mentioned earlier, she had a religious talk with each her own children. On this line, she had a extended family prayer meeting. This was a

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<sup>29</sup> Monk and Newton insisted that Wesley's discipleship under the influence of the Puritanism, but Baker corrected this understanding from the perspective of his parents' theological position as Anglicans. Ibid., 22.

<sup>30</sup> This means that these two movement as not regular church activities. But from the context of ecclesiolae in ecclesia, these two movements were in the Church of England.

private prayer meeting open to the public. Susannah reported to her husband about her meeting:

With those few neighbours that then came to me I discoursed more freely and affectionately. I chose the best and the most awaking sermons we have. And I spent somewhat more time with them in such exercises without being careful about the success of my undertaking. Since this our company increased every night, for I dare deny none that ask admittance. ... We banish all temporal concerns from society. None is suffered to mingle any discourse about them with our reading or singing."<sup>31</sup>

This meeting is not an official church meeting like the Worship Service. However, Susannah recognized it as a part of Church activity which was substituted by Susannah when Samuel was absent in Epworth. This private service was significant in two aspects. One is it was a private society outside the official church activity. In a theological sense, this movement is *ecclesia in ecclesiolae*. There was no doubt that John Wesley attended this meeting. However, we don't know whether he realized the importance of this meeting. At least, he experienced this meeting at Epworth, to hear his mother reading sermons and to sing the hymns. This was a pioneer meeting of a society meeting. Another significance of this expanded meeting at Epworth was that the leader of this meeting, Susannah Wesley, was a woman. Later, even in the Methodist movement, a woman preacher had major role. But at the time of Susannah Wesley, it was a rare case

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<sup>31</sup> Journal of John Wesley, vol.2, 33. [This is originally from the letter from Susannah to Samuel, dated February 6th, 1712.]

that a woman led a religious meeting.<sup>32</sup> Her extended family prayer meeting on Sunday night was probably a kind of a prototype of a religious society for Methodism.

#### Samuel Wesley's discipleship Group

John Wesley probably experienced Susannah's extended family prayer meeting. On the other hand, John probably did not have first hand experience of his father's small group movements.

First, let us consider the historical background of his discipleship groups. In 1701, Samuel Wesley made his own small group at Epworth. This small group is placed in the larger context of the small group movement in eighteenth century in England.<sup>33</sup> This large movement was started by Horneck. Anthony Horneck was a German, educated at Oxford, and ordained in the Church of England. He organized his first religious group in London in 1678. Horneck set rules for his society. There were several features in his rules. The purpose of the society was "to resolve upon an holy and serious life."<sup>34</sup> Holiness of life was the main theme of the society. This theme of the society became common to other society movements.

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<sup>32</sup> Chilcote examine women preacher in the Methodism. He wrote "In Methodism some of women played a major part. While the woman preacher of early Methodism were by definition exceptional." Paul Wesley Chilcote, John Wesley and the Woman Preachers of Early Methodism (The Scarecrow Press: Metuchen, 1991), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Heitzenrater, 120-121.

<sup>34</sup> Dean, 474. rules I.

Another feature of this society was this religious society activity was under the Church of England. The membership of this society required that they be a member of the Church of England. This means all members of this group were Anglican people.<sup>35</sup>

The last feature of this religious society is they emphasized practical Christianity, not doctrinal understanding of Christianity. In their rules, there was no doctrinal standard for their members. It is supposed that the doctrinal standards were included in the membership of the Church of England. So they just concentrated on their practical way of Christian life. This influence spread throughout England. "These religious societies spread through most of the larger cities in the country, and many smaller towns as well."<sup>36</sup> Horneck's religious society is a trigger of the society movement in England.

After Horneck, Josiah Woodward wrote "Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London" in 1678. They made the Society for Promoting

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<sup>35</sup> In Dean's dissertation, there is Horneck's rules as appendix. About the membership of society, Horneck set a rule in this way: "That no person shall be admitted into this society till he arrive at the age sixteen, and hath been first confirmed by the Bishop, and solemnly taken on himself baptismal vow." This membership indicates that a member of a society should be a member of the Anglican Church. This society movement is basically reforming movement of the Church of England. This means this religious society movement based on the idea of Ecclesia in ecclesiorae which is a theological foundation of society movement. Ibid., 474-75

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

Christian Knowledge (Hereafter, S.P.C.K.). Woodward set rules for his religious group.<sup>37</sup> There were several significant points in his rules. First, as well as Horneck, Woodward also required membership in the Society limited to those in the Church of England for the unity of their Society. "That in order to their being of one heart and one mind in this design, every member of this Society shall own and manifest himself to be of the Church of England."<sup>38</sup> Another important point concerns the Interactive spiritual relationship with each other in the Society. Rule III said that "That members of this Society shall meet together one evening in the week at a convenient place, in order to encourage each other in practical holiness, by discoursing on such subjects as tend thereunto...."<sup>39</sup> Rule IV said "that the whole bent of the discourse be to glorify God and edify one another in love."<sup>40</sup> These rules indicate religious discourse was the basis of internal relationship among members. To love and encourage people was a practical way of inter-relationship. In addition to these, Woodward recommended to pray with each other in their private prayers

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<sup>37</sup> These rules were for his own church, Poplar Church in London. The title of these rules is "Specimen of the Orders of the Societies". He published his book including these rules in 1698. Ibid., 476. There is full text in Simon's book. John S. Simon, Religious Society and John Wesley, (The Epworth Press: London 1921), 12-14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 12.

(Rule X. 17). This intercessory prayer was a spiritual support for each other. This inter-action of members contributed to intimate relationships inside the Society. This intimate relationship was the most important feature of Woodwarth Society.

In this religious society movement, Samuel Wesley had a relationship with S.P.C.K. Samuel Wesley made his own society at Epworth rectory under the influence of S.P.C.K. Samuel Wesley set rules for his own religious society.<sup>41</sup> From these rules, we can understand some activities of this society at Epworth. Samuel Wesley's Society had several activities which were indicated in his own rules.

Every week at set hours, when 2, 3, or more do meet together for this Intent, First to pray God; secondly, to read the Holy Scriptures, and discourse upon Religious Matters for their mutual Edification; and Thirdly, do deliberate about the Edification of our neighbour, and the promoting of it.<sup>42</sup>

He emphasized the internal relationship of Society, so he limited the number of members in one society to twelve to

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<sup>41</sup> In S.P.C.K. movement, each Society had their own rules. So there is a difference among Societies. If we compare S.P.C.K. with Wesley's Methodism, there are couple features of Methodism. Wesley set rules for all Methodist Societies and classes. There is a unity inside the Methodist movement. In other words, Wesley took a major role as the leader of Methodist movement. In the S.P.C.K. rules, there is no requirement for membership and no doctrinal statement. On the other hand, Wesley gave a requirement for the members of Methodist Society. He gave also the doctrinal standard statement for Methodist Societies.

<sup>42</sup> Dean, 479. Appendix, "Samuel Wesley's Epworth Society." These rules were included in his letter to S.P.C.K. On February 7, 1702, Wesley sent a lengthy report of the beginning and conduct of a religious society at Epworth to S.P.C.K.

keep intimate relationships inside the society (Rules IV). Inside activities are to pray, to read the Scripture, and to discourse upon religious matters. These activities cultivate spiritual intimacy in a society. Samuel also emphasized activities outside of his religious society. His ideas of activities of his Society are evangelism, setting up schools for the poor, and to take care of the sick and other poor (Rules I, XI, and XIV). These inside and outside works of society are unique in comparison with Woodwarth's Society. Especially, the works for outside the Society are preeminent in the practice of his society. Later, his son, John, organized Oxford Methodism and started social actions with his colleagues. Samuel wrote to John and said Samuel was proud to be called 'the grandfather of the Methodists.' Samuel Wesley's society was a forerunner to the Methodists. There was a rich tradition of Society activity and discipleship movement before John Wesley.

In later years, John Wesley was in contact with the S.P.C.K. before he left for Georgia.<sup>43</sup> Apparently John Wesley received his father's discipleship influence. There was a religious small group movement in the early eighteenth century. Methodism did not emerge suddenly, but developed in the context of a historical movement of religious societies.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Heitzenrater, 322-24.

Wesley's Theological DevelopmentWesley's Change in 1725

The year 1725 was a crucial one for John Wesley. He began to discipline himself seriously, and he changed his lifestyle radically. He thought on more theological matters than before. Martin Schmidt examined his notebook and pointed out that Wesley filled it with religious matters.<sup>45</sup> The reason for this is Wesley considered his ordination sincerely. From this time on, Wesley concentrated on two main theological themes: seriousness of the call to ordination and the necessity of assurance of salvation.<sup>46</sup> Apparently his parents inspired him in these two themes. Both his parents wrote letters to his ordination. Both agreed with his ordination basically and gave advice to him.

Samuel Wesley gave him a warning about his intention to get into Orders: "The principal spring and motive, ... must certainly be the glory of God, and the service of his church, in the edification and salvation of our neighbour."<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Susannah Wesley gave him a advice about his salvation and assurance of salvation. She wrote:

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<sup>44</sup> Simon, 9-15. He includes the rules of Horneck's society and Rules of Woodward's Society. And Dean's dissertation includes Samuel Wesley's rules of Society. Dean, 475-479

<sup>45</sup> Martin Schmidt, John Wesley: A Theological Biography (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1962), vol.1, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Fujimoto, 13.

<sup>47</sup> "Letter from the Rev. Samuel Wesley January 1725" "Letters I," BE works vol.25, 157.



I heartily wish you would now enter upon a serious examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ, that is, whether you are in a state of faith and repentance or not, which you know are the conditions of the Gospel covenant on your part.<sup>48</sup>

Apparently Wesley accepted his parents' advices. He began to think about his own salvation seriously. He began to develop his own theological thinkings.

#### Influence of Jeramy Taylor

In this year, 1725, there was a crucial element for Wesley in changing his mind. This was to read religious readings, especially Jeremy Taylor. Jeremy Taylor's two books, The Rules and Exercise of Holy Living and The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying were classic religious books at the time of Wesley. Probably Sarah Kirkham introduced these books to Wesley.<sup>49</sup> Martin Schmidt pointed out Jeremy Taylor's influence on Wesley was more practical than theological: "Taylor's books had a definite effect upon John Wesley, but this was due, not to their general viewpoint, but to the directions they contained for the practical exercises of religion."<sup>50</sup> This practical influence on Wesley was to live in front of the Almighty God. He realized that he himself had all responsibility for his heart and life in front of God. He wrote by himself about the influence of

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<sup>48</sup> "Letter from Susannah Wesley February 23, 1725," "Letters I," BE Works vol.25, 160.

<sup>49</sup> Schmidt, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Schmidt, 80.

Taylor.<sup>51</sup> There was no compromise and middle between God and self. Wesley's changing mind was the basis of his later disciplined life throughout his life, though there were still theological problems about salvation and assurance. The importance of this year is that Wesley decided to live in holiness through discipline. He began to keep a diary from this year. He changed his lifestyle more seriously, he subjected himself to incessant self-examination and spiritual discipline.

He set rules for himself after the reading of Taylor.<sup>52</sup> These rules are Wesley's originals which were apparently different from Taylor's suggestions. Martin Schmidt compared Wesley to Taylor this way:

When this is compared with Jeremy Taylor the points common to both are unmistakable, but Wesley has cast them all into a permanent form and strictly systematized them. The result is something temperate and disciplined, with the emphasis no longer upon feeling or the striking of a pious attitude. The character of the whole is completely changed.<sup>53</sup>

The foundation of his practical side of discipleship was established at this point. Wesley never destroyed this fundamental point since that time, even though he sometimes failed or struggled with his own rules.

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<sup>51</sup> Works of John Wesley, Jackson ed. vol.9, 366.

<sup>52</sup> Journal of John Wesley, Curnock ed. vol.1, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Schmidt, 81.

Influence of Thomas á Kempis

Another religious book influencing Wesley was á Kempis' Imitation of Christ. Wesley critiqued á Kempis. There was a fundamental difference between á Kempis and Wesley. He wrote a letter to his mother about his opinion against á Kempis. He realized this difference.

I think he must have been a person of great piety and devotion, but it is my misfortune to differ from him in some of his main points. I can't think that when God sent us into the world he had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it. If it be so, the very endeavour after happiness in this life is a sin, as it is acting in direct contradiction to the very design of our creation.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley apparently disagreed with á Kempis's other-worldliness. á Kempis insisted that a Christian should take off this worldliness and take up his or her own cross. Wesley criticized this point. Denying this world leads to the strict idea of sin and the idea of a miserable situation for humans in this world. Wesley supported his argument from Song of Songs. God's purpose of creation is not to place humans in a miserable condition, but to make them happy. Wesley considered that taking his own cross and having innocent fun are compatible, instead of incompatible which á Kempis thought. We could find the seed of two important ideas in Wesley's consideration against á Kempis; Happiness and Grace. For Wesley, to look forward to happiness was not

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<sup>54</sup> "Letter To Mrs. Susannah Wesley, dated on May 28, 1725" "Letter I," BE Works, vol.25, 165.

bad, it was the end of human existence. Wesley criticized a Kempis as follows:

He seems to carry the matter as much too far on this other side afterwards, where he asserts that nothing is an affliction to a good man, and that he ought to thank God even for sending him misery. This, in my opinion, is contrary to God's design in afflicting us.<sup>55</sup>

Here we find Wesley's emphasis of the love of God. His understanding of God's main character was Love. In this love, Holiness and Happiness are combined. Wesley used this combination repeatedly throughout his life.<sup>56</sup>

The end of human existence is to pursue "happiness in God."<sup>57</sup> Wesley's idea of this happiness is the ultimate end of discipleship. Wesley already conceived the important basic idea of discipleship at this point.

Wesley's mother, Susannah Wesley, responded to his letter concerning a Kempis just after she received a letter from him. This letter was dated June 8, 1725. She agreed with John basically, "believing you do him justice, I do very positively aver that he is extremely in the wrong in that impious, ... suggestion, that God by an irreversible decree hath determined any man to be miserable in this

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>56</sup> Fujimoto, 120.

<sup>57</sup> Sermon #6 "Righteousness of Faith" BE Works, vol.1, 213. This sermon was preached in 1739. After his Aldersgate experience. Chronologically, this sermon is included in middle Wesley, but the idea of happiness of human was not so different at the time of his letter to his mother. In his letter, he quoted Ps. 68, "Let the righteous rejoice, and be glad in the Lord; let them also be merry and joyful."

world."<sup>58</sup> However she corrected his view of happiness, self-denial and humility.

The true happiness of man, under this consideration, consists in a due subordination of inferior to the superior powers, of the animal to the rational nature, and of both to God. This was his original righteousness and happiness, that was lost in Adam. ... the inversion of this order is the true source of human misery. ... Our Blessed Lord, who came from heaven to save us from our sins, as well as the punishment of them, as knowing we could not be happy in either world without holiness, did not intend by commanding us to 'take up the cross' that we should bid adieu to all joy and satisfaction, but he opens and extends our views beyond time to eternity. ... And because he knew we could not do this without great contradiction to our corrupt animality, therefore he enjoins us to take up this cross, and to fight under his banner against the flesh, the world, and the devil.<sup>59</sup>

Susannah indicated a clear understanding of relationship between self-denial and state of happiness. Self-denial is necessary for Christianity. God is always good to us, but the problem of sin necessitated our self-denial. The result of sin made it impossible to regain original righteousness. Men have distorted the order of our will and God's will. Submission to God's will is the only hope for humans to achieve holiness. In a practical way, submission to God's will was indicated through taking up the cross. This humiliation before God is necessary for one's own salvation. This self-denial was Susannah's main understanding of practical Christianity which we already saw in her discipline of her children. Wesley apparently took this self-denial as

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<sup>58</sup> "Letter from Mrs. Susannah Wesley, dated on June 8, 1725." "Letter I," BE Works, vol.25, 164.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.164

a main point of discipleship. Another important point was the idea of humiliation. Wesley was confused about the state of humiliation and state of the uncertainty of salvation. He raised a question about humility:

Give God thanks for every weakness, deformity, or imperfection, and accept it as a favour and grace, an instrument to resist pride. ... A true penitent must all the days of his life pray for pardon, and never think the work completed till he dies. Whether God has forgiven us or not we know not; therefore still be sorrowful for ever having sinned. If his opinion be true, I must own I have always been in a great error; for I imagined that when I communicated worthily, i.e. with faith, humility, and thankfulness, my preceding sins were *ipso facto* forgiven me .... But if we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but fear and trembling, and then undoubtedly in this life WE ARE of all men most miserable! ... Humility undoubtedly necessary to salvation, and if all these things are essential to humility, who can be humble, who can be saved?<sup>60</sup>

Susannah answered his question about humility:

Humility is the mean between pride, or an overvaluing ourselves, on one side, and a base, abject temper on the other. It consists in an habitual disposition to think meanly of ourselves, which disposition is wrought in us by a true knowledge of God, his supreme, essential glory, his absolute, immense perfection of being! A just sense of our dependence on and past offenses against him, together with a consciousness of our present infirmities and frailty.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of God dominated her idea of humility.

Compared with the perfection of God, man could not have pride. In front of the presence of God, man could have real humility. This becomes a habitual situation. There is no "on the other hand." This humiliation becomes meek and

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<sup>60</sup> "Letter to Mrs. Susannah Wesley," Ibid., 170.

<sup>61</sup> "Letter from Mrs. Susannah Wesley," Ibid., 172.

modest to others. This humiliation is one of foundations for discipleship. Wesley promoted strict discipleship through out his life, but he was aware of the danger of pride. Without humility, discipleship would be religious elitism. There was a possibility that the more one progressed in spiritual discipleship, the more he was proud of his progress and despised others. This pride destroys the foundation of spiritual discipleship. Until his Aldersgate experience, humility was one of spiritual conditions of salvation for Wesley.<sup>62</sup>

#### His understanding of Original Sin

After theological dialogues about à Kempis and Taylor, Wesley and his mother discussed predestination and original sin. Self-denial and the problem of sin are closely related with each other. These two were thought out in Wesley's mind relatively early compared with salvation by faith. These two topics are considered with his mother through their correspondences.<sup>63</sup> Wesley started arguing about original sin in 1727.<sup>64</sup> His question about original sin was not only a

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<sup>62</sup> Fujimoto, 14. cf. Baker also pointed out this concerning about Oxford Methodist.: "In the hierarchy of Christian virtues which he was zealously striving to inculcate in his spiritual charges humility ranked at the top with love. Both had been enforced by Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor, those key influences upon him in 1725." Baker, 27.

<sup>63</sup> "Letter to Mrs. Susannah Wesley, dated March 19, 1927," "Letters I," BE Works, vol.25, 212-215.

<sup>64</sup> Schmidt pointed out that Wesley had developed these topics over one and half years. Schmidt, 89.

Fujimoto examined Wesley's idea of original sin in chronological way. Early Wesley (1725-38) emphasized contrast

theological argument but a more practical argument. He wrote to his mother; "Why would Infinite Goodness permit me to contract a habit of sin even before I knew it to be sinful, which has been a thorn in my side almost ever since?"<sup>65</sup> He began to lead a disciplined life in 1725. That revealed more his own sinful heart than before, so he asked this kind question about original sin. However, he tried to mortify to himself, it revealed his own sinful nature more than ever. His understanding of sin was not a metaphysical understanding, but more epistemological and existential. Here we could see the hinge of the problem of discipleship.

Sin and discipleship are closely related to each other. Total depravity is the root of all practical sin, including sin in behavior and sins in thoughts. This root is founded in our wills against the will of God. To conquer Wesley's own will was the most important thing for achieving his salvation. A disciplined life indicates the result of

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between original righteousness and fall into state of sin and necessity of salvation. For Middle Wesley (1738-1750), Doctrine of original sin was the foundation or presupposition of justification by faith. That means man cannot work out his own salvation by himself. For Late Wesley (1750-), the doctrine of original sin became one topic of disputation. He argued against Enlightenment and Humanism. And he accused social evil as the result and effect of original sin. Fujimoto, 125.

<sup>65</sup> BE Works, vol.25, 213. Susannah answered this question based on the goodness of God. "He often demonstrates the power of his mercy toward us by bringing good out of sin, the greatest evil; and his not hearing our prayers proves sometimes, in the event, the greatest instance of his favour" Letter from Mrs. Susannah Wesley. BE Works vol.25, 216.



conquering his own will against God's will. This idea became the theological foundation of Wesley's discipleship.

There were so many things that happened in 1725. This year was one of the crucial years for Wesley. He founded several theological thoughts and practical matters of discipleship during this year. Throughout his early period, Wesley received good foundational experience for his discipleship mainly from his parents. Wesley developed his own theology and practices of discipleship. He prepared to move into the movement of the Oxford Methodism.

## Chapter 3

## THE OXFORD METHODISM

Historical Account of the Oxford Methodists

In Wesley's understanding, Methodism started with Oxford Methodism. Wesley wrote the Origin of Methodism in his pamphlet A Short History of the People called Methodists in 1781. "In November 1729, at which I came to reside at Oxford, my brother, and two young gentlemen more, agreed to spend three or four evenings in a week together. On Sunday evening we read something in divinity; on other nights, the Greek or Latin classics."<sup>66</sup> Wesley himself gave credit to the Oxford Methodists for the beginning of Methodism. This is significant for understanding the origin of Methodism. In fact as an organization, Methodism started at the point of separation from the Fetter Lane Society. Wesley finally made his own discipleship group at that time. However, he traced back his original movement to the beginning of the Oxford Methodism. Why did Wesley see Oxford Methodism as the beginning of Methodism? This question is the central issue of this chapter. Apparently Wesley saw the continuity between Oxford Methodism and Methodism rather than the differences between these two. However, there are many differences between these two movements. Why did he recognize Oxford Methodism as the foundational movement for the later Methodism? In what sense did he think in this way?

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<sup>66</sup> "Short History of Methodism" (1765), BE Works, vol.9. 426-27.

For understanding this topic, we first have to realize that Wesley's understanding of the origin of Methodism was retrospective. His first mention of the origin of Methodism appeared in 1760's. There is a possibility of a tendency toward nostalgia in that he made his memory of Oxford Methodism more worthy than it was in reality. At the same time, there is some confusion of time during the Oxford Methodism in his writings. Wesley sometimes wrote his article from his memory which was not accurate.<sup>67</sup> So in the process of reconstructing a historical account of Oxford Methodism, Wesley's later writing about Oxford Methodism should be treated carefully. Heitzenrater decoded Wesley's Oxford Diary in his dissertation.<sup>68</sup> We can gain good information about Wesley's life in Oxford from Heitzenrater's dissertation.

As Heitzenrater examined, another important point in Wesley's purpose of writing was not only to tell how Methodism had originated, but to explain why God had raised up the Methodists to fulfill the particular purpose of reforming the Church.<sup>69</sup> Wesley understood the origin of Methodism not merely as of human origin, but as a work of God

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<sup>67</sup> For example, Wesley wrote his origin of Oxford Methodism as the study group for the Greek New Testaments. However, the fact was that the beginning of the Oxford Methodist was the study group for the classics. cf. Baker, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Heitzenrater, viii-xi.

<sup>69</sup> cf. Heitzenrater, 35.

for the Church. This concept of Church renewal was a basic understanding of Methodism. In Wesley's mind, both Oxford Methodism and later Methodism existed for Church renewal. So this small group in Oxford set a foundation for the later Methodist movement.

Chronologically, the Oxford movement has two major periods: 1729-1732 and 1732-1735, when the Wesleys left for Georgia. The difference of the periods was based on the changing of members in the Oxford Methodists. The first period started with the Wesley brothers, Bob Kirkham, and William Morgan. In the winter of 1731, many of first period's members of the Oxford Methodists left Oxford for some matters or affairs.<sup>70</sup> The last original member besides the Wesley brothers, William Morgan, left Oxford in the winter of 1732. At this point the first period of Oxford Methodists ended. However, it did not mean the end of the Oxford Methodism. The Wesley brothers continued to stay in Oxford and to practice their discipleship. After that, other members joined them. These members were Westley Hall, James Hervey, John Gambold and John Clayton.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Heitzenrater, 156-58.

On page 158, Heitzenrater wrote the situation of Wesley after original members, William Morgan, John Boyce, Robert Kirkham, Mr. Hayward left Oxford. "But as Mr. Wesley continued activity to implement his concept of a design for Christian living, a new group of friends began to develop around him, his brother, and their new acquaintances, John Clayton, Westley Hall. Matthew Salmon, John Gambold, Benjamin Ingham, Will Clements, and William Smith."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 158.

This member changing made a development for Oxford Methodism. For example, Clayton suggested to read religious books on weekday nights. It was accepted and practiced. This indicated that the activities and character of Oxford Methodism was not dominated by only John Wesley. Though John Wesley had leadership, there were mutual interwoven relationships inside the Oxford Methodism. These mutual relationships changed Oxford Methodism from inside the movement.

The first period of Oxford Methodism was a foundation period for the later period. The Oxford Methodists started as a fellowship of Oxford students. They spent several nights for the study of classics and weekend nights for religious matters from reading of religious books. In this period, attendance of members was more free. There was a varied number of members attending each of the meetings. That was a significant feature of the Oxford Methodist meetings compared with the later Methodist movement. There were no strict rules for attendance of the meetings. Attendance of the meetings depended on individuals. Compared with the Methodist class meeting which had the attendance checking list, there was more structural flexibility in the Oxford Methodists.

This attitude toward the Holy Club made Oxford Methodism a company of people which had a 'like-minded atmosphere.' Frank Baker pointed out that this 'company of like-minded' devotees could both urge each other on to better

churchmanship and provide spiritual checks against any fanciful or misguided behaviour.<sup>72</sup> In spite of structural differences, spiritual intimacy in the meetings to support each other was the same in the both movements. This supporting system would become a principle of the Methodist discipleship meetings.

In the beginning of the second period of Oxford Methodism, there was a significant structural change. Sub-groups within the Methodists' meeting pattern became evident during the spring-summer period in 1732.<sup>73</sup> This structural change predicted hierarchical structure in the Methodist movements. This hierarchical structure developed more and more in the later Methodist movement. Wesley appointed class leaders and used hierarchical structures effectively. But this did not happen in Oxford Methodism. This hierarchical structure was based on individual activity rather than Wesley's leadership. The Oxford Methodists had more individualistic aspects rather than later Methodism.

The other significant change which happened in Oxford Methodism was the pattern of meetings. They read a book and discussed it in their meeting. Until 1732, their main concern for study in their meetings were classical literature during the week and devotional works on the weekend. With the shift of membership, there was a noticeable transition in

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<sup>72</sup> Martin Schmidt, vol.2, part 2, 26.

<sup>73</sup> Heitzenrater, 159.

their readings. They began to read religious literature during the weekday. At this point, the focus of the meetings of the Oxford Methodism shifted from the study of classics to religious studies, especially religious biographies. The Oxford meetings became more religious in their activities.<sup>74</sup>

#### Theological developments during Oxford Methodism

There was a diverse theological background for Wesley's practices in Oxford Methodism. Wesley never ignored the practical side of Christianity. He examined his theology through his experiences. This pragmatism is one of his methodologies of theology. Examining what Wesley practiced is important to understanding how Wesley applied his theology to his daily life, especially for understanding his discipleship. Their practices of discipleship had two dimensions, personal piety and social piety.

#### Influence of Puritanism

In 1731, Wesley read Treatise of Christian Prudence by John Norris of Bemerton who was a pious Platonist. This book influenced Wesley in that Norris introduced the prudential means of grace to Wesley.<sup>75</sup> This book is important in teaching Wesley covenant theology. Wesley has already set

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<sup>74</sup> They began to read de Renty on weekday nights. Wesley had two types of meeting at this point. One included Westley Hall and Charles Wesley reading Caesar. The other group included John Clayton and Charles Wesley reading de Renty. This indicates that Wesley himself had strict ideas of organized movement for discipleship in 1732. Heitzenrater, 159. It based on [OD. III, 2 (June 23, 1732)].

<sup>75</sup> Baker, 25.

the goal of Christianity toward holiness. From this book Wesley learned the means to achieve this goal, covenant theology.

The key passage of the Scripture for covenant theology was, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments." (Matt. 19:17) The way of obedience was believed to be the way of achieving everlasting happiness which was the last stage of holiness for Norris.<sup>76</sup> Norris made a distinction between two covenants, old covenant and new covenant according to the traditional Puritan understanding. The Puritan understanding of covenant theology relates God himself to the creature by covenant, especially to man. This relation between God and man by covenant is conditional than absolute.

The Covenant of Works runs in these terms, 'Doe this, and thou shalt live, and I will be thy God. This is the covenant that was made with Adam in paradise. And the covenant that is expressed by Moses in the moral Law, doe this, and live. The second is the Covenant of Grace, and that runnes in these terms, Thou shalt believe, thou shalt and take my Son for thy Lord, and thy Saviour, and thou shalt likewise receive the gift of righteousness, which was wrought by Him, for an absolution for thy sinners, for a reconciliation with me, and therefore thou shalt grow up in love and obedience toward me, then I will be thy God and thou shalt be My people.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Samuel Mitsuru Fujimoto, Wesley's doctrine of good work, Ph.D. Diss., Drew University, 1987, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1987), 91.

<sup>77</sup> Robert C. Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 97-98. (originally from New Covenant Christian Library IV, p.31. ed. by John Wesley.)



Puritans made a clear distinction between the old and new covenant. The old covenant is called the Adamic covenant which required good works for achieving one's own salvation. The new covenant is similar to the old covenant. The new covenant also requires good works and diligent obedience to the commandments of God. This covenant theology emphasized the initiation of God toward salvation. However, this emphasis was diminished by an emphasis of discipleship and keeping covenant. Apparently Wesley took the latter part of this emphasis during the Oxford Methodism.

This idea of covenant became one of Wesley's favorite ideas. He repeatedly used it in his sermons and he published an abridged version of Puritan covenant theology in his Christian library. A response to the grace of God gave a responsibility and an accountability to men. This idea of good works based on grace gave Wesley a synergetic idea of achieving salvation. In the context of soteriology, this covenant theology provided a rationale for a believer's obligation and duties. At this point, Wesley absorbed Puritan covenant theology as his own context of soteriology.<sup>78</sup>

Wesley made his own covenant before God on July 19, 1733. John Wesley wrote,

In the Name of God! Amen!  
I do resolve to devote the remainder of my life to God  
my Creator, God my redeemer, and God my Sanctifier,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.,, 100-105.

- I. By immediate application to Him, either
    - 1. By Prayer, public or private, or
    - 2. By reading (1) The Fathers, (2) True, Affectionate Divinity, or (3) Absolutely necessary miscellanies.
    - 3. By Meditation, at least from 4 to 1/2 every afternoon, unless company or absolutely necessary business [private]
  - II. By application to my fellow servants, either
    - 1. By Speaking to (1) Pupils, (2) Relations, (3) Friends, (4) Acquaintance, (5) The afflicted, (6) The wicked, or
    - 2. By Writing ---- either by Composing (1) Geneses and Letters for my pupils, Relations, Friends, Acquaintance, (2) Practical Treatises for the P[oor] and Wicked, (3) Sermons for all: Or by Abridging (1) Uncommon treatises for Pupils and Acquaintance, (2) Plain ones (as Christian Monitor) for the Poor and Wicked:
- Or (1) By Translating True Divinity for all.<sup>79</sup>

This covenant included a much deeper personal commitment to God than just setting rules. This covenant made clear consciousness to every aspect of life in the presence of God. Each activity of life was dedicated to God. Wesley took the theory of human responsibility for stewardship seriously and practiced it in his own life. This covenant indicated Wesley's activity as a steward of God based on his understanding of good works. An important theological point in this covenant is his understanding of God. Wesley expressed God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. God as Creator indicated that He was a creature who must follow the instructions of God. This understanding emphasized God's Sovereignty. The second idea of God is as Redeemer. This

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<sup>79</sup> Baker, 35-26. originally from [ In MS 'Coleman VII' in Methodist archives, London. This covenant was repeated on 12 Oct. 1733 with a variant ending: "By Translating Affectionate Divinity for All. Amen!]

indicated that Wesley believed God gave him salvation from sin. And on this foundation, the whole Christian life would be built. The last understanding of God is as Sanctifier who cleanses him throughout his life. There is hope for his disciplined life. When a human works his own good works by grace, God responds and cleanses his heart from all evils and he is transformed, fitted for heaven.<sup>80</sup> His understanding of Covenant is not based on mere theology of good works, but on the theology of synergism. God gave us grace, so we need to work out our own salvation. This idea of human responsibility was a basic idea for discipleship.

#### William Law and the Oxford Methodists

One of the most influential persons for the Oxford Methodists and especially for Wesley was William Law. William Law was born in 1686. After he studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he became a ordained minister of the Church of England. He refused, however, to take the oaths of allegiance and abjuration. Law became one of the leaders among the Non-jurors. He became famous through his publications, The Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection and A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life.

John Wesley collected his books in 1731 and then he started to read his book Serious Call on July 7, 1732.<sup>81</sup> Wesley

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<sup>80</sup> This understanding of Christian life was fully indicated especially in his sermon, "The Circumcision of the Heart" (dated on January 1, 1733), BE Works, vol.1, 401-414.

<sup>81</sup> Wesley mentioned in his Journal that he read Law in 1727-28. [Journal 1734,5, 24.] However, Serious Call was

visited Law soon after his reading in 1732. William Law became Wesley's mentor during the Oxford time. Since then, Wesley had a close relationship with William Law until Wesley's Aldersgate experience in 1738.<sup>82</sup> Law's influence on Wesley was obvious and cannot be neglected.

William Law influenced Wesley in both practical and theological ways. The influence of Law was written in Christian Perfection:

Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call were put into my hands. These convinced and me, more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of), to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance.<sup>83</sup>

Here Wesley wrote his renewed commitment to the Lord as a totally devoted Christian. Law's influence upon Wesley is not only this total devotion to the Lord, but also a disciplined life by many rules.

Lindström pointed out that William Law's ultimate goal of religion was the 'participation in the happiness of Christ in heaven.'<sup>84</sup> But there was a problem for achieving this

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published in 1729, Wesley could have not read this book until 1729. And there is no mention about William Law and his books until 1731 according to Heitzenrater who decoded Wesley's Oxford Diary and reconstructed Wesley's life in Oxford. Frank Baker also agreed Wesley probably did not read Law until 1730. cf. Frank Baker, "John Wesley's Introduction to William Law," Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society 37, 1969-70, 81.

<sup>82</sup> Schmidt, vols.2, part 1, 97.

<sup>83</sup> "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," The Works of John Wesley, vol.9, 367.

goal, the problem of sin. Law also agreed with total depravity in human nature. Human cannot do anything without God's grace. For William Law, the definition of Christianity is

"a course of Holy Discipline, solely fitted to the need of God's grace to cure his own disease, however, his practical emphasis is on the disciplined life to achieve Cure and Recovery of fallen Spirits, and intends such a Change in our Nature, as may raise us to a nearer Union with God, and qualify us for such high Degrees of Happiness."<sup>85</sup>

Law recognized that humans need this Christian Perfection. According to Law, salvation is sanctification in which a human being would change by grace through his own good works and mortification toward this world throughout his life. Man must follow Christ not in the sense of outward resemblance, to the particular actions of Christ, but in the sense of inward resemblance in Spirit and Temper. However, this resemblance in Spirit and Temper could be measured by our acts in accordance with the same rules as Christ and with eyes focused on the same Goal. This transition from inwardness to outward activity caused the tendency of legalism among the followers of Law.

Finally, Law's view of assurance of salvation is this; "only if he does everything he possibly can for his own salvation, can he expect to be accepted by God. We can have no security of our salvation, but by doing our utmost to

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<sup>84</sup> Lindström, 163. Lindström examined theology of love in William Law in the same book on pages 161-171.

<sup>85</sup> Ted A. Campbell, John Wesley and Christian Antiquity, (Nashville: Kingswood Book, 1991), 25.

deserve it."<sup>86</sup> Apparently there is no assurance of salvation in this world. For Law, there is no sure salvation from sin, or forgiveness of sin in this world. His goal always pointed out the salvation in heaven. This goal is so important that the others are only the means to attain this ultimate goal. So, Law minimized the objective aspect of atonement. Instead of this, he emphasized the necessity of imitation of Christ. Lindstrom explained Law's view of Christianity in this way: "Thus humility, mortification, and love to God and our neighbour become the chief characteristic of the Christian way of life and the essentials of Christianity."<sup>87</sup> Lindstrom defined the theological position of William Law as "a practical mysticism."<sup>88</sup> Love to God and neighbors are emphasized more than the love of God toward human. This emphasis on Christian practices rather than God's love and atonement undercut the doctrine of salvation by faith and assurance.

Apparently, William Law's view of Christianity was reflected in John Wesley's understanding of Christianity during his Oxford time. Wesley wrote his view of Christianity around 1730:

Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer, then  
indispensable necessity of having 'the mind which was  
in Christ,' and of 'walking as Christ also walked;' even  
of having, not some part only but all the mind which was

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<sup>86</sup> Lindström, 163.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 164.

in him; and of walking as he walked, not this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an uniformity to our Master. Nor was I afraid anything more, than of bending this rule to the experience of myself, or of other men; of allowing myself in any the least disconformity to our grand Exemplar.<sup>89</sup>

This quote indicates that his view of Christianity was influenced by the views of Law. This theological understanding became a foundation of Oxford Methodist practices. They practiced both love to God and neighbors according to this theological position.

Sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart"

Wesley's theological development during the Oxford Methodism presented in his sermon, The Circumcision of the Heart, as the superb theological expression. It was one of the most important sermons for the early Wesley. Wesley preached this sermon at St. Mary's Oxford on January 1, 1733. Wesley himself gave a credit to this sermon.<sup>90</sup> Wesley revealed his basic understanding of soteriology in this sermon. This sermon also reflected the influence of Law. Examining this sermon reveals to us the theological understanding of early Wesley.

First, Wesley explained his understanding of original sin and the situation of humans this way, "we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that without the

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<sup>89</sup> "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," The Works of John Wesley, vol.9, 367.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 367-68.

Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin."<sup>91</sup> The presumption of existence of human beings is original sin. He emphasized the wickedness and powerlessness for good of humans. The only hope for human beings is God's grace. From this, Wesley founded the grace of God for his soteriology in his earliest place. The solution to this sickness is faith. Wesley defined 'faith as the teacher' to reveal the glory of God. Later, Wesley added the definition of faith to this definition as the personal trust in God's unmerited mercy. He also added forgiveness of sin and assurance of salvation in this text.<sup>92</sup> However, at this point, Wesley didn't have the doctrine of justification by faith.

Concerning Wesley's anthropology, he emphasized that the end of human existence is God himself. He said: "Have no end, no ultimate end, but God,"<sup>93</sup> This means 'the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity.' To attain this end, we need to have the nature of humility and practice discipline of self-denial. In this sermon, Wesley described humiliation as "he is deeply convinced of that inbred corruption of his nature," and "he continually feels in his inmost souls that without the Spirit of God resting upon him he can neither think, nor

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<sup>91</sup> Sermon #17 "The Circumcision of the Heart" BE Works, vol.1, 403.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 405. cf. footnote no.44 said, "In 1732 Wesley was still preoccupied with holy living. Here, in 1748, he has added his discovery of justifying faith as unmerited mercy and as the assurance of forgiveness through the merits of Christ's propitiatory death."

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 408.



desire, nor speak, nor act anything good or well-pleasing in his sight."<sup>94</sup> This idea of humiliation is the self-recognition of powerlessness and one's own total corruption in his own heart. From this self-recognition of his own sinful situation, a human will try to trust in God's power. And this faith in God is expressed in self-denial. For Wesley, love for God and self-denial are the surface and the back of the same coin.

Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions. Fix your eye upon the blessed hope of your calling, and make all the things of the world minister unto it. For then, and not till then, is that mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus', every work of our hands, we pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure'; when we, too, neither think, or speak, nor act, to fulfill our own will, but the will of him that sent us; when whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.<sup>95</sup>

This keeping our intention to God and practicing discipleship is the way of salvation for Wesley. This understanding of the Christian life followed the idea of William Law's which we have already seen. He strongly emphasized practical self-denial. "Vain hope! that all children of Adam should ever expect to see the kingdom of Christ and God without striving, without 'agonizing' first 'to enter in at the strait gate'!" His sermons had the character of apology for the activities of the Oxford Methodists, and the basic understanding of discipleship was revealed in this sermon.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 413-14.

The importance of this sermon was pointed out by Wesley himself in his A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. He wrote, "this sermon was composed the first all my writings which had been published. This was the view of religion I then had, which even then I scrupled no to term perfection. This is the view I have of it now, without any material addition or diminution."<sup>96</sup> Wesley revealed that he had a concept of Christian Perfection at that point already and that his definition of Christian perfection was not changed. Wesley's soteriology aimed at this idea of Christian perfection. For this end, Wesley developed his whole theology and Christian practices. At this point there was theological continuity between the Oxford Methodists and the Methodist. Without this understanding, the importance of Oxford Methodism couldn't be understood. However, Wesley had a missing ring in his soteriology. He could not establish the way of the salvation or the order of salvation during Oxford Methodism.

#### Practices of the Oxford Methodism

The practice of Oxford Methodism had two dimensions: personal piety and social piety. These two pieties can be said to be piety toward God and charity toward others. The basis of the discipleship was the Scripture. Before starting Oxford Methodism, Wesley had already carefully studied the Holy Scripture from 1727 as a devotional aid and as the

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<sup>96</sup> The Works of John Wesley, vol.11, 369.

authoritative handbook. He used the Scripture as the cannon of every aspect of life, both personal and social. Wesley wrote; "From the very beginning, for the time that four young men united together, each of them was *homo unius libri* -- a man of one book." <sup>97</sup> This emphasis on the Scripture became more clearer later in the Oxford Methodist movement. In the early period of Oxford Methodism and until 1732, the meetings were held for the study of classics or for the religious conversations. Compared with this later period, they met for the study of the Scripture. Wesley began to study Scripture systematically on January 17, 1732, at 4:30 a.m.<sup>98</sup> This change soon influenced the Oxford Methodists. "Method of reading the Scriptures" provides the basics for his late definition of a Methodist as "one that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible."<sup>99</sup> The basis of the Oxford Methodists' practices was defined by the Scripture. The study of the Greek New Testament was also according to the method. Gamblod, one of the members of the Oxford Methodist, wrote about his method to his friend Ingham:

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<sup>97</sup> Schmidt, vol.2, part.2, 29. This notion need to be careful to read because Wesley and his friends had the first meeting for the study of Greek and Latin classics, not the study of the Scripture. Baker pointed out that Wesley confused this meeting in 1731. At least, this quotation indicated the importance and central position of the Scripture in the Oxford movement.

<sup>98</sup> Heitzenrater, 155.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 155. For this definition of "Methodists" Heitzenrater gave a reference of Wesley's "Complete English Dictionary (1753) s.v. "Methodist."

Read the Scriptures constantly; the Holy Ghost delights chiefly to reveal to us our duty from these writings; we ought to try all Human writings by the test of Scripture and only to approve of them as far as they agree with Scripture, but by no means to interpret Scripture by them; the Holy Scripture is our Master; -- if like newborn babes we desire the sincere milk thereof, we shall undoubtedly be nourished up to eternal life; for the Holy Ghost opens to us our duty as we are fitted to practice it, and at different times shall understand the same chapters in different meanings.<sup>100</sup>

Two things are noteworthy. One is the authority of the Scripture. Wesley and the Oxford Methodists had never doubted it. Every experience and doctrine was measured by this norm. The other is the Divine illumination during reading the Scripture. The Holy Spirit helps people not only to understand the Scripture, but also to apply the Scripture to our daily lives. This idea of illumination is a characteristic point of the Oxford Methodists. They based this on the study of the Scripture. They were looking at the Scriptures systematically for what Christianity is and how they should act as Christians. This attitude toward the Scripture has never changed throughout Methodism. This view of the Scripture was so important for Wesley. He emphasized Scripture as the basis and measure of their practices. Without this measure, the activity and teachings of the Oxford Methodists could not stand firm.

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<sup>100</sup> This cited in Heitzenrater, 344. It is originally from Charles Ingham MS. Diary, 51, (April 1, 1734). Heitzenrater made a comments; "This probably summarizes the essence of Wesley's "method for reading the Scriptures."

Keeping a diary. Wesley started keeping his diary from 1725, and continued his diary during the Oxford Methodist time. He recommended to his friends in Oxford to keep diary for checking their own accountability toward God.<sup>101</sup> Wesley revised his diary entries several times. According to Heitzenrater who examined Wesley's Oxford Diary and reconstructed Wesley's life in the Oxford Methodism, Wesley changed his style of diary in December 1734 dramatically.<sup>102</sup> The new style was more exact to use for their discipline. "It promoted keeping of an hour by hour record of one's adherence to the Wesleyan design, in prayers, moods, activities, resolutions, and nearly every aspect of daily life."<sup>103</sup> Their diaries were not merely keeping a record of activities. They were more than that. Heitzenrater indicated Wesley's list of diary entries: " 1) The hour, 2) the activities of that hour, 3) then number of minutes spent in devotion during that hour, 4) the record of recollection, 5) the attitudes and feeling which characterize the activities of that hour, 6) the resolutions broken, 7) the resolutions kept, and 8) special blessings."<sup>104</sup> These items of the list indicates that Wesley tried to check almost his

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<sup>101</sup> Later concerning time, Wesley wrote sermon "Redeeming time." In this sermon, Wesley indicated his understanding of time and life.

<sup>102</sup> Heitzenrater, 252.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 254.

every activity and intention in presence of God. This systematized life is the most characteristic point of the Oxford Methodism for individual lives. This practice of keeping a diary is like an accounting of one's own real life, including intentions and behaviors. The Wesleys and their friends in Oxford took the responsibility to live in front of God seriously. These checking lists indicate that their idea of stewardship was based on keeping the commandments of God. Wesley practiced keeping a diary as one of the means of accountability in his life. However, this accountability was different from later Methodist Accountability. This accountability had more legalistic aspects. Wesley himself described this situation as under the law, not grace.<sup>105</sup> They recognized the necessity of works of Love, but they did not realize God's love itself which is the basis of whole good works at this point. Keeping a diary was a symbol of the Oxford Methodist life as an accountability. Compared with the later Methodist movement, to keep a diary was the hallmark of Oxford Methodism. John Wesley himself practiced keeping his diary throughout his life, until just before his death. However, he did not require it of his class members and society members. This did not mean that the Oxford Methodism was totally different from the later Movement.

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Sermon #9 "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," BE Works, vol.1, 248-66. In this sermon, Wesley made a three stages of human condition in front of God; the natural state, legal state, evangelical state. Natural state is the condition in which a man did not realize his own sin, as if he sleep spiritually.

This difference was based on the circumstance and social status of the members. The Oxford Methodists were mainly students of the Oxford University. Everyone could read and had enough money to buy note and ink. Compared with the Oxford Methodists, the later Methodist members came from poor and low society conditions. Some of the members were illiterate. Hence keeping a diary was not suitable for all members of the later Methodists movements.

Fasting. They practiced fasting from the beginning of the Oxford Methodism. This particular practice of fasting became a 'hallmark' of the Oxford Methodists.<sup>106</sup> Especially, the death of Morgan in 1732, made the practice of Fasting notorious among opponents.<sup>107</sup> In spite of accusation against the Oxford Methodists, they not only kept fasting, but also they developed their fasting practice. It was more apparent after Wesley read Robert Nelson's Festival and Fast. In June 1732, the Oxford Methodists practiced fasting twice a week in imitation of the primitive Church.<sup>108</sup> The reason why they practiced fasting was not only to follow the Primitive Church, but also as a good practice of self-denial.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Heitzenrater, 162.

<sup>107</sup> Wesley wrote letters to Mr. Morgan for defending of Oxford Methodism. BE Works, vol.25, 367-71.

<sup>108</sup> BE Works, vol.18, dated on May 24, 1738. cf. sermon #122 "Cause of the Inefficacy of Christianity" BE Works, vol.4, 94. In this sermon, Wesley looked back his Oxford days and made a comment about fasting. In June 1732, they practiced fasting on Wednesday and Friday until at least 3:00 p.m.

The Lord's Supper. From the outset the Oxford Methodists emphasized attendance at Holy Communion, which was called a 'Sacrament.'<sup>110</sup> They tried to attend it as often as possible. This regular attendance of Holy Communion was insisted by Wesley throughout his life. He published the sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion" around 1787. At the preface of this sermon, Wesley said to readers, "The following discourse was written above five and fifty years ago, for the use of my pupils at Oxford. I have added very little, but retrenched much."<sup>111</sup> The reason why every Christian should receive the Lord's Supper as often as they can are, first, it is a plain command of Christ. Secondly, the benefits of doing so are great, including the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls.<sup>112</sup> In Wesley's understanding, when we receive the Lord's Supper, the presence of God and God's grace effects our souls. When we receive the Lord Supper, something happens in our souls. More practically, receiving the Lord's Supper requires self-examination and prayer.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sermon #122 "Cause of the Inefficacy of Christianity" BE Works, vol.4, 95. In this sermon, Wesley regretted the Methodist people did not practiced fasting like the Oxford Methodist people.

<sup>110</sup> Baker, 27.

<sup>111</sup> Sermon #101, "The Duty of Constant Communion" BE Works, vol.3, 428

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 429-430.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 430.



At this point, to receive the Lord's Supper was a good time of spiritual accountability.

Communal Group. As a communal piety, the religious group meeting worked as the means of a communal piety. The academic setting of Oxford University gave Oxford Methodism the study activity naturally. At this point Oxford Methodism was not for ordinary people like the Methodist movement. Basically, it was an academic and religious movement inside the University and under the Church of England. The end of both movements was to pursue the holiness of heart and life. Oxford Methodism was for the elite students in Oxford University. It is correct that Dean defined the Oxford Methodist was the movement for a 'few.'<sup>114</sup> This tendency for the academic atmosphere made it possible to search theological truth from their readings. Clayton introduced Law and Nelson into Oxford Methodism. From these books, Wesley and his colleagues took a lot of theological impact and practical suggestions as already seen. Concerning reading in the group, the Scripture was the most important book. Probably after 1732 when Wesley made a systematic method for the study of the Scripture, it became more obvious. They studied Greek New Testaments for their meetings.

The purpose of the meeting was not only to study with each other, but also to engage in religious conversation.

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<sup>114</sup> Dean, 78.

According to Heizenrater, Wesley frequently took time for religious conversation besides his small group meetings. For example, Wesley presented his sermon, "The Circumcision of the Heart," to his friends before he actually preached it.<sup>115</sup> These friends helped Wesley to organize this sermon. This example indicates Wesley's theological and practical development was not only by himself, but by receiving the help of many friends. Religious conversation was a means of this helping system. This attitude to help with each other or to go together was a principle attitude for the Oxford Methodists. The spiritual journey was not alone, but with intimate companions. There is no individualistic Christianity, but social Christianity.

Social activity. The activities of the Oxford Methodists were not limited inside themselves. They practiced not only personal pietism and communal pietism, but also social activity. They practiced visiting the sick, the poor and prisoners. There are also Scriptural basis for these activities. Wesley frequently mentioned about doing good and loving all your neighbours. These is Scriptural basis for the social outreach of the Oxford Methodists. To love God should appear in love of neighbours. In Wesley's

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<sup>115</sup> Heitzenrater, 196-97. Heitzenrater examined that how carefully Wesley prepared this sermon, "The Circumcision of the Heart." Not only for good sermon, but also how people react and response this sermon. Heitzenrater defined this sermon as "his first clear statement of heat was to become a distinctive hallmark of Methodism -- the doctrine of Christian perfection.

mind loving God was directly connected to loving neighbours. Methodists. So, social activities were not strange for the Oxford Methodists, but it was the result of their logical and Scriptural sequence.<sup>116</sup>

Most of these social activities were not inventions of John Wesley. William Morgan started to visit prisoners. This visiting prison was not unique for the Oxford Methodists, but it was common among the Society Movements. However, William Morgan introduced this activity to the Oxford Methodists. John Clayton opened the door of visiting workhouses and started to help the poor.<sup>117</sup> In these movements, Heitzenrater defined the role of Wesley as this: "Wesley's role at that time was to see how these various activities were consistent with a larger attempt to promote inward and scriptural holiness. To this end he made these endeavors an integral part of the Methodist life-style."<sup>118</sup> Wesley made methods of visiting sick, teaching poor children, helping poor in the workhouse. Wesley himself did these methodical and theoretical works and theologized these social activities as meaningful works for their own salvation. Wesley worked as the leader and brain of the Oxford Methodists. Around Wesley, the Oxford Methodists improved their social works

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<sup>116</sup> cf. Mat.22:37-39

<sup>117</sup> Heitzenrater, 175.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 382-83.

throughout their time. These social outreaches were also succeeded by the later Methodist movements.

#### Theological Problem of the Oxford Methodists

The theological and practical foundation of the Methodist movement was set during this time. But Wesley had not experienced God's saving grace. This experience made a distinction between the Oxford Methodism and the later Methodist movement.

The main point which Oxford Methodism emphasized was that they disciplined themselves to pursue holiness, underlined by the various activities and by the method.<sup>119</sup> Holiness should be achieved only by obedience, by discipline and by rules. They emphasized regeneration and love to God and people, however, this inward condition or reality should come out through discipleship. On the other side, our hearts have a tendency toward evil, setting rules and obedience to God through these rules helps mortification of oneself. The end of discipleship is holiness. To gain this holiness of heart and life, discipleship is necessary for Wesley and Oxford Methodism. Theological understanding of anthropology and soteriology are important for understanding Wesley's discipleship during Oxford Methodism. From theological foundations, practical discipleship came out, and Wesley checked his theological problem through his own practices, especially, his own assurance of salvation.

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<sup>119</sup> Baker, 26.

Dean looked at the Oxford Methodists as a legal discipleship. On the other hand, Fujimoto pointed out that the problem of Early Wesley was not the salvation by works, but that they ignored saving faith and regeneration, and jumped into living as Christians.<sup>120</sup> Wesley's problem was not that he did not realize the danger of legalism, but he did not have the inner being of God's love. It is easy to judge Wesley's practices in Oxford Methodism as the mere legalism, but we have to realize his emphasized the principle of loving God and neighbours. The evaluation of having this love was based on their behavior. So there was a tendency toward legalism to evaluate their outward behaviors. However tending toward legalism, Wesley's theological foundation and emphasis was not on the mere legalism. So, Fujimoto's understanding of Oxford Methodism is more accurate than Dean's.

However the theological problems of Oxford Methodism, Oxford Methodism still stood as the foundational movement of the Methodism. There is a continuity between Oxford Methodist and later Methodist movements. The style of discipleship and the purpose of discipleship was to pursue holiness. However, the end of the discipleship was good; the means to achieve this end, holiness, had a tendency toward legalism. Wesley wrote that he tried to follow Christ as the great Exemplar. He paid attention to follow Him exactly.

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<sup>120</sup> Fujimoto, Theology of John Wesley, (Tokyo, Evangelical Publish Association, 1990), 38.

Wesley tried to follow Christ without experiencing the inward life of Christ. That was difficult for him. The basic practices were pretty much the same, like visiting the poor, fasting, praying, reading the Scripture, etc., but the foundational theology of each was different. This is crucial to understanding Oxford Methodism.

Some theologians neglect the period of Oxford Methodists and jump into the Aldersgate experience. But if we want to understand Wesley, we need to recognize the importance of early Wesley, because we have examined that foundational things were set during this period. After the Aldersgate experience, Wesley's discipleship formulated his own evangelical theology of discipleship. Without the Oxford Methodist, there is no Methodist. Next we will examine the formulation of the Methodist discipleship of Wesley.

## Chapter 4

## WESLEY'S VIEW OF DISCIPLESHIP AND THE MORAVIANS

Wesley's Discipleship as a Missionary

On the way to Savannah, Georgia, Wesley met a group of Moravian people. This encounter with Moravian people made a major contribution to Wesley's theology and discipleship including his Aldersgate experience. Wesley had a relationship with the Moravian people until the separation from Fetter Lane Society.

In this chapter, the writer examines Wesley's development of his soteriology as the foundation of his idea of discipleship. There were three stages in his development: until Aldersgate experience, his Aldersgate experience, and separation from the Moravian movement. In following these three stages, Wesley's understanding of faith and good works, or discipleship, developed significantly. This period could be called a formational period of an evangelical foundation of discipleship.

Wesley's Discipleship on a Ship

From 1735 to 1738 John Wesley went to Savannah, Georgia, as a missionary. John Wesley went with his brother Charles and his friend Charles Ingham. During this period, Wesley practiced his own disciplined life throughout his stay in Georgia, even on his ship. Wesley wrote about his lifestyle on the journey this way:

We now began to be a little regular. Our common way of living was this: from four in the morning till five each of us used private prayer. From five to seven we read the Bible together, carefully comparing it with the

writings of the earliest ages. At seven we breakfasted. At eight were the public prayers. From nine to twelve I usually learned German, and Mr. Delamotte, Greek. My brother write sermons, and Mr. Ingham instructed the children. At twelve we met to give an account to one another what we had done since our last meeting, and what we designed to do before our next. About one we dined. The time from dinner to four we spent in reading to those of whom each of us had taken charge, or in speaking to them severally, as need required. At four were the evening prayers, when either the Second Lesson was explained, or the children were catechized and instructed before the congregation. From five to six we again used private prayer. From six to seven I read in our cabin to two or three of the passengers and each of my brethren to a few more in theirs. At seven I joined with the Germans in their public service, while Mr. Ingham was reading between the decks to as many as desired to hear. At eight we met again, to exhort and instruct one another. Between nine and ten we went to bed.<sup>121</sup>

This disciplined lifestyle was not only for Wesley, but it had a communal aspect. They read the Bible together and had public prayer. This communal aspect of discipleship was a feature of Wesley's discipleship. His practice was not individual discipleship but fellowship discipleship. Punctuality of time was one feature of this record, his lifestyle dominated by the hour, and accountability in the presence of God was two another major reason for this discipleship. This point was never changed during this period. The continuity of a disciplined lifestyle indicated his understanding of the Christian life did not change during this period. These practices were based on his theological understanding of salvation.

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<sup>121</sup> BE works, vol.18 p.138



Wesley's discipleship in Savannah

Another significant practice of Wesley's discipleship was in his own church in Savannah, Georgia. During Wesley's stay in Savannah, he practiced discipleship not only by himself but also in his church.<sup>122</sup> Schmidt wrote about the significance of this discipleship. Wesley's practice of discipleship in his church had a different aspect from the practice of the Oxford Methodists. This practice fostered discipleship for ordinary people, not for elites like Oxford students. That was a different from Oxford Methodists. At the point this discipleship group at the Savannah church was similar to the Methodist movements. This strategic change from the Oxford Methodist was the most significant change for Wesley's discipleship. Schmidt's evaluation of discipleship in Savannah was 'an important step' toward the Methodist movements. That is correct in the sense of strategy, but not in the sense of his theology.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> cf. "Letter to Dr. Bray's Associates," The Letters of John Wesley, ed. Telford, 214. "Some time after the evening service, as many of my parishioners as desire it meet at my house (as they do also on Wednesday evening), and spend about an hour in prayer, singing, and mutual exhortation. A smaller number (mostly those who design to communicate the next day) meet here on Saturday evening; and a few of these come to me on the other evenings, and pass half an hour in the same employment."  
Schmidt, vol.2, part 1, 191-92

<sup>123</sup> Wesley himself recognized the importance of Savannah small group in the context of the development of Methodism. He wrote about this in "Short History of People Called Methodists," BE Works, vol.9, 428-430.

In spite of this changing, Wesley's description of the small group at Savannah church was a normal, not an emotional expression. It seemed that Wesley himself did not recognize this change as important. It could be a natural and regular pastoral matter. This indicated that Wesley himself did not make a distinction between the spiritual elite and ordinary people. There was no distinction between the Oxonian and ordinary people. There was no difference among believers, even though they may have had a different social status, cultural situations, etc. Everyone must achieve his own salvation.

Another significant aspect of this small group was that joining the small group was voluntarily. Wesley recognized that a voluntary spirit was one of the features of a discipleship movement. Wesley realized the will of a man is important for one's own salvation. If a man will his own salvation, God would give him His grace more than before. Human will plays a big role in his own salvation. The "voluntariness" was measured by one's own attitude toward discipleship. This idea of voluntariness is one of the theological and practical basis of Wesley's discipleship.

Schmidt stated that Wesley's practice of discipleship in his church in Savannah was a failure.<sup>124</sup> This evaluation of Wesley's work in Savannah is not accurate. We need to make a distinction between his pastoral work and his discipleship

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<sup>124</sup> Schmidt, vol.2, 191-92.

within the church. Wesley's pastoral work was a failure, but his discipleship was not totally a failure. As to the pastoral work, Wesley was too strict with his own rules, and there was a lack of realization of God's grace which enabled people to attain their own salvation. Wesley met a serious pastoral problem with some in his congregations. He finally left Savannah in 1737. In spite of this fact, Wesley's discipleship group was not failure. Baker correctly pointed out that his pastoral work was a failure, but his discipleship group survived for a while.<sup>125</sup> After Wesley's departure from Savannah, Whitefield arrived there and succeeded Wesley's work there. He reported some poor people in Savannah lamented the loss of Wesley. However, the spiritual links of Wesley's discipleship in Savannah are almost impossible to trace, because there were not enough documents for that. At least, Wesley's discipleship in Savannah was not a totally failure.

#### Changing Wesley's view of Faith

During Wesley's stay in Georgia, and his trip there, he encountered the Moravian people, and he developed a close relationship with them. There was an important encounter with the Moravian people on the ship. This encounter especially influenced Wesley's view of Christian faith. Encountering the Moravian people, Wesley first found a difference between Moravians' faith and his own faith.

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<sup>125</sup> Frank Baker, From Wesley to Asbury (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), 11-13.

Wesley felt fear of death during a storm on board the ship. On the other hand, the Moravians were very calm and looked up and sang on. Wesley asked a Moravian, "Was you not afraid?" He replied mildly, "I thank God, no. ... our women and children are not afraid to die."<sup>126</sup> The difference was assurance of faith. Wesley always had tried to make his own confidence for standing in front of God at the time of his own death. But reality was totally different from his own thought and wish. In the danger of his own death, he became totally afraid of it. Wesley did not have the reality of faith. What was wrong with him? To solve this question, we must understand his understanding of faith during this time.

In 1725, Wesley had corresponded with his mother, Susannah, about faith. He wrote to her: "faith as an assent to a proposition upon rational grounds."<sup>127</sup> Wesley saw that faith started from rational ground and progresses toward assent.

This position was as a rationalist. Susannah Wesley responded to Wesley's letter in August 18, 1725:

You are somewhat mistaken in your notion of faith. All faith is an assent, but all assent is not faith. Some truths are self-evident, and we assent to them because they are so. Others, after a regular and formal process of reason, by way of deduction from self-evident principle, gain our assent; and this is not properly faith but science. Some again we assent to, not because they are self-evident, or because we have attained the knowledge of them in a regular method, by a train of

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<sup>126</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 142-43. (Journal dated on Jan. 25, 1736)

<sup>127</sup> BE Works, vol.25, 175.

arguments, but because they have been revealed to us, either by God or man, and these are the proper object of faith.<sup>128</sup>

Susannah was in agreement with John Wesley's position basically, however, she pointed out that the objects of assent were more important than assent itself. We need to assent to the truth. There are many truths for our assents. She made a distinction science and faith. Both start from rational assent, but science could be assent by 'the knowledge of assent in a regular method.' On the other hand, an assent to God is a proper assent of faith. This was based on the revelation of God. Wesley agreed with his mother. From that point, for Wesley, faith was not mystical but rational and intellectual. It was important what he knew, and what he agreed upon for his definition of faith. The problem of this view was that there was no personal relationship with God through faith. There is no reality of God and His grace for Wesley. He had only his intellectual agreement with the sound doctrine. He knew and agreed with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, he could not make a bridge between himself and these facts or doctrines.

The encounter with the Moravian people also affected his view of faith and good works. Wesley wrote his view of faith and good works before being influenced by the Moravians in his diary on January 24, 1738, "I now believe the gospel is

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<sup>128</sup> "Letter from Mrs. Susanna Wesley. Aug. 18, 1725." Ibid., 179.

true. 'I show my faith by my works,' by staking my all upon it. I would do so again and again a thousand times, if the choice were still to make. Whoever sees me sees I would be a Christian."<sup>129</sup> Here Wesley's confession indicated that good works do not give salvation. He had an idea of the means of grace already at this point. However, he thought good works proved his faith. But Wesley did not have confidence in his faith and assurance of his salvation. So, he checked his intentions and behaviors and tried to work hard at doing good.

In the diary on the date April 23, 1738, Peter Böhler taught Wesley that holiness and happiness are the fruits of living faith.<sup>130</sup> Wesley honestly confessed that he was surprised at Böhler's teaching. This understanding of the relationship between faith and holiness was opposite to Wesley's understanding.

This understanding of faith is apparently different from Peter Böhler's understanding of faith. This difference is whether the center of faith is inside or outside. The tendency of John Wesley's understanding of faith was to look inside one's own heart, whether someone assent the truth. Wesley examined his own heart every moment. This understanding of faith troubled Wesley, especially concerning his assurance of salvation. The more he used his method of

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<sup>129</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 211.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 232.

discipline for establishing his own faith, the less assurance of faith he had. This problem ironically was caused by his own disciplined life.<sup>131</sup> Wesley wrote the relationship between good works and faith in his diary on January 24. "I now believe the gospel is true. I show my faith by my works, by staking my all upon it. I do so again and again a thousand times, if the choice were still to make Whoever sees me sees I would be a Christian."<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, Peter Böhler's understanding of faith has tendency to look outside of his own heart, namely the works of Christ. To trust in Christ is the center of faith. Wesley wrote Böhler's understanding of faith in his diary dated on May 24, 1738, "justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification and redemption."<sup>133</sup>

Encountering the Moravian people enlightened Wesley to a new aspect of faith, of faith as trust. This trust aspect of faith produced the assurance of faith. He desired their assurance of faith strongly. Wesley could not understand Moravians' faith intellectually. Their faith was too experiential for Wesley to understand. Wesley was taught by

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<sup>131</sup> Wesley wrote his own spiritual journey in his journal dated on May 24, 1738. This record indicated us how he struggled with his assurance of faith. BE Works, vol.18, 242-50.

<sup>132</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 209.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 248.

the Moravian people about faith until May in 1738. The significance of the Aldersgate Experience was that Wesley had faith in Christ in the sense of a saving faith.

His wrote about faith just after that experience in his sermon, "Salvation by faith." "Christian faith is then not only an assent to the whole Gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection."<sup>134</sup> From this view of faith, the whole scheme of Wesley's theology turned around.

Wesley set faith as the starting point of all good works as well as Peter Böhler. That was the importance of his Aldersgate experience. Upon this basis, his practical discipleship was built toward Christian Perfection.

#### Wesley's Problem of Weak Faith

Wesley visited Germany after his Aldersgate Experience. The reason to visit Germany was twofold. One was that Wesley wanted to see the center of the Moravian movements with his own eyes. Another reason was to solve his own spiritual problem, named 'weak faith.'

Wesley struggled with his weak faith after his Aldersgate experience. On May 29th Wesley wrote, "Though his (faith) be strong and mine weak, yet that God hath given some degree of faith even to me I know by its fruits. For I have constant peace, not one uneasy thought. And I have freedom

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<sup>134</sup> Sermon #1, "Salvation by faith," BE Works, vol.1, 121.



from sin, not one unholy desire."<sup>135</sup> Wesley recorded a letter from Oxford about weak faith. It said that "no doubting could consist with the least degree of true faith; that whoever at any time felt any doubt or fear was not weak in faith, but had no faith at all."<sup>136</sup> Wesley's question was whether there is weak faith or not, and how they had strong faith. This practical problem led him to go to Germany.

Wesley wrote;

I determined, if God should permit, to retire for a short time into Germany. ... My weak mind could not bear to be thus sawn asunder. And I hoped the conversing with those holy men who were themselves living witness of the full power of faith, and yet able to bear with those that are weak, would be a means, under God, of so stablishing my soul, that I might 'go on from faith to faith, and from strength to strength'.<sup>137</sup>

The reason why Wesley visited Germany was to find the answer about strong faith and the assurance of faith. The interesting point was that while Wesley practiced his methodical life style and had his small groups, these good works did not help him to have a strong faith and an assurance of faith. Aldersgate experience itself was beyond Wesley's control. Concerning faith, Wesley apparently realized that faith is the gift from God. So, he has never ignored the doctrine of sola gratia.

In Germany, Wesley mainly talked with Christian David about weak faith. Christian David was one of the leaders of

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<sup>135</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 253.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 254.

the Moravians. He was an original member of the Moravian people when they came to Herrnhut. He brought Moravians to Herrnhut.<sup>138</sup> Wesley recorded David's four sermons in his journal. David defined weak faith as they "who are justified, but have not yet a new clean heart; who have received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, but have not received the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, or like twelve disciples before the day of Pentecost."<sup>139</sup> He also made a distinction between 'Christ given for us' and 'Christ living in us.' The fact that Christ was given for us is the basis of justification and whole salvation, however the fact that Christ lives in us was more formational and process going. Christian David asked people, "Is Christ formed in you? Have you a new heart? Is your soul renewed in the image of God? Is the whole body of sin destroyed in you? Are you fully assured, beyond all doubt or fear, that you are a child of God?"<sup>140</sup> Here Christian David had a primitive distinction between sanctification and justification. However, it was not fully developed. Apparently Wesley was satisfied with Christian David's explanation about weak faith. Wesley accepted his problem of weak faith as not only his personal problem, but as a common problem among Christians. He finally gave an explanation of weak faith.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 273-276.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 279-80.

Yet, upon the whole, although I have not yet that joy in the Holy Ghost, nor that love of God shed abroad in my heart, nor the full assurance of faith, nor the proper witness of the Spirit with my spirit that I am a child of God, much less am I, in the full and proper sense of the words, in Christ a new creature; I nevertheless trust that I have a measure of faith and am 'accepted in the Beloved'; I trust 'the handwriting that was against me is blotted out', and that I am 'reconciled to God through his Son'.<sup>141</sup>

The weak faith was concerned the assurance of faith. Wesley made a distinction between to have faith in Christ and to have the full assurance of salvation. This distinction made Wesley possible to theological developement of spritual growth. Having a faith in Christ is different from having the full assurance of salvation. Christian must grow up in sprituality toward full salvation.

This weak faith understanding was also a starting point of distinction between sanctification and justification, and the relationship between Christian life and sanctification. Wesley and Zinzendorf made a discussion about this weak faith. This argument led them to separate from each other. This argument will be examined in later chapter in this thesis.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 16-19. On Oct. 14, 1738, Wesley received a letter and thought about weak faith in this way: "first was that his judgment are new, his judgment of himself, of happiness, of holiness. Second, his design which is the design of his life not to heap up treasures upon earth, but to regain the image of God. Thirdly, his desire are new. His desires are no longer fixed on earthly things, but heavenly things. Fourthly, his conversation is new. Fifthly, his actions are new. The tenor of his life singly points at the glory of God." In these senses, he was a new creature, but he does not have assurance of faith." This letter which Wesley mentioned in his Journal was from Charles Delamotte. BE Works, vol.25, 567-68.

The Example of German Pietism

Wesley's visit to Germany had another significance, Wesley saw the activities and systems of German Pietism with his own eyes. He visited Herrnhut and Halle twice for a short visit. These two cities were two major Pietists centers at that time. Herrnhut was a Moravian, Halle was Francke's successors. In these cities, Wesley was much impressed by the two movements. Wesley observed Francke's Orphan-house, and his school at Halle. He was amazed by Francke's social works. Wesley admired Francke and his work, "August Hermann Francke whose name is indeed as precious ointment. O may I follow him, as he did Christ!"<sup>142</sup> Wesley had already practiced his social works as an Oxford Methodist. Francke's social activities was for beyond Wesley's activities as an Oxford Methodist. Francke's activities impacted Wesley for social activities in later Methodists movements.

On the other hand, Wesley observed the Moravian's discipleship group and pastoral care system at Herrnhut. Wesley recorded their systems and activities in detail.<sup>143</sup> Wesley examined Herrnhut according to the officer of it; the division of the people, the conferences, lectures, and government of the children; and the order of divine service. In practical ways, Wesley's Methodist movement received

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<sup>142</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 264.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 291-297.

several influences from the Moravian Church. Towlson pointed out five direct influences and three indirect influences of the Moravian Church. Direct influences of the Moravian Church were the Band system, Hymn-singing, the Love-feast, the Watch-night service, and the conference. On the other hand, there were several Moravian examples and advocacies to Methodism. Wesley already had an idea of some of them, but still the Moravians made an impression upon Methodism; these were Field-preaching, Lay-preaching, and Education.<sup>144</sup> German Pietism influenced Wesley in practical ways. We cannot neglect Pietists' influence on Wesley.

#### The Fetter Lane Society

The beginning of the Fetter Lane Society was May 1, 1738. At this point, Wesley did not had his Aldersgate Experience. This Society nurtured Wesley's spiritual dawn and his faith after his crucial spiritual experience. The Fetter Lane Society played an important role in Wesley's discipleship. For example, Wesley experienced one of his spiritual revivals on January 1, 1739. And he made a final decision to go to Bristol for helping Whitefield as a field preacher according to the decision of the Fetter Lane Society. This experience to preach the gospel on a field was a decisive spiritual experience for Wesley.<sup>145</sup> Separation

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<sup>144</sup> Clifford W. Towlson, Moravian and Methodist: Relationship and Influence in the Eighteenth Century. (London: The Epworth Press, 1957), 246-47.

<sup>145</sup> Albert Outler, John Wesley, 17.  
Fujimoto Wesley's Theology, 53-54.

from this society made a final form of Wesley's own discipleship system. Wesley himself recognized the Fetter Lane Society as one of the predecessor movements for the Methodists' society.<sup>146</sup> In spite of this direct connection to the Methodists movement, the Fetter Lane Society was more than that. This society was a unique group in terms of a mixture or a combination of Moravianism and Anglicanism. Podmore correctly pointed out this significance in this way:

Four years later (from the foundation) this society was to give birth to the first congregation of the Moravian Church in England. From it, more directly than the Oxford Holy Club, the Methodist societies and the church which they became claim descent. During that annus mirabilis, 1739, the Fetter Lane Society was the hub of the Evangelical Revival in England.<sup>147</sup>

The Fetter Lane Society was the place where Moravians and Methodists influenced each other and finally separated from each other.

There was no doubt that Peter Böhler made a great contribution to this. As a Moravian leader, Böhler tried to establish Moravian influence inside the Church of England. Wesley recognized that Peter Böhler was a main figure of the Fetter Lane Society. Wesley wrote that Peter Böhler's advice

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<sup>146</sup> Wesley wrote: "The first rise of Methodism, so called, was in November 1729, when four of us met together at Oxford; the second was at Savannah in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house; the last was at London on [1 May, 1738], when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to a free conversation, begun and ended with singing and prayer." The Works of John Wesley, vol.8, 307.

<sup>147</sup> C. J. Podmore, "The Fetter Lane Society, 1739-1740," Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, XLVI, no. 5 (1988): 156-185.

was crucial for this Society. However, Wesley's contribution to the beginning of this society was ambiguous. Podmore pointed out Wesley was there by chance, he did not had a major role for this beginning of the Society.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, Frank Baker and Martin Schmidt recognized that Wesley made a contribution to the beginning of Fetter Lane Society.<sup>149</sup> This society was different from the preceding Anglican religious societies. This society apparently had strong Moravian influences through Peter Böhler. In its rules, we can find the Moravian influence. "That the persons so meeting be divided into several 'bands', or little companies, none of them consisting of fewer than five or more than ten persons."<sup>150</sup> Especially, this influence appeared in its band system. There was no band system inside the Church of England until the Fetter Lane Society. According to Rule 10, there was another significant Moravian influence on the Fetter Lane Society, the love-feast.<sup>151</sup> The love feast contributed to develop intimate relationships for the members inside the Society. These Moravian influenced practices dominant in the Fetter Lane Society.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 137-140.

<sup>149</sup> Baker, 74-75.

<sup>150</sup> BE Works, vol.18, 236.

<sup>151</sup> "That on the Sunday sennight following be a general love-feast, from seven till ten in the evening." Journal dated May 1, 1738. BE Works, vol.18, 236.

However, there was a significant change from the Moravian band system in the Fetter Lane Society. That was the idea of confession. Rule 1 said, "that they will meet together once in a week to 'confess our faults one to another, and pray for one another that we may be healed.'"<sup>152</sup> This mutual confession was different from the Moravian confessional style. Moravians' confession was not mutual confession, but they chose monitors in bands as a leader and they confessed their faults and sins to their monitor.<sup>153</sup> Later James Hutton suggested that the Fetter Lane Society would accept monitor system according to the practice of the Moravians in Germany. Wesley rejected his suggestion from mainly Scriptural basis and practical potential dangers. He said, "Every man in my band is my monitor."<sup>154</sup> Wesley perceived that monitor system was not right for Christian practice. At the beginning of the Fetter Lane Society, it was easy to imagine that Peter Böhler introduced the monitor system into the Society. But it was not introduced in rules of the Society. This was apparently Wesley's contribution to the Fetter Lane Society. His writing; "it was agreed by us," indicates Wesley's involvement at the beginning of this society. Frank Baker correctly pointed out that the Fetter

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<sup>152</sup> Journal dated May 1, 1738. BE Works, vol.18,236.

<sup>153</sup> Fujimoto, 60.

<sup>154</sup> The Letters of John Wesley, vol.1, 272-73.



Lane Society was made up of the cooperation between Moravianism and Anglicanism.

At the beginning, the Fetter Lane Society was under the strong influence of Moravianism. Three days later after the Fetter Lane Society was founded, Peter Böhler left England to go to America on May 4, 1738. After that Wesley became one of the leaders in this society. Anglican influence was much stronger. For example, on January 1, 1739 there was no Moravian minister in the love-feast for the Fetter Lane Society. Anglicanism and Moravianism began to openly conflict with each other. Especially since the Moravians' teaching about stillness and Wesley's synergetic teaching were opposite to each other. This tension between the Moravians and Wesley was never resolved.<sup>155</sup> Wesley finally departed from the Fetter Lane Society, July 20, 1740. On July 23, 1740, Wesley and his followers started to gather at the Foundry.<sup>156</sup> Wesley's discipleship became totally under Wesley's leadership.

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<sup>155</sup> Wesley and Moravian conflicts was not merely theological issue but more complicated relationship. Wesley's conversation with Count Zinzendorf indicates that Moravian people expected Wesley became a part of Moravian Church. So Zinzendorf accused Wesley "why change your mind." Wesley had a friendly feeling to Moravian Church, but he accused weak points of Moravian Church in his letter to Herrnhut just after his visitation to Herrnhut. His strictness and seriousness toward the truth and Christian practice made a final decision to separate from Moravian Church.

<sup>156</sup> Wesley wrote, "Our little company met at the Foundry insted of Fetter Lane. About twenty-five of our brethren God hath given us already, all of whom think and speak the same thing; seven or eight and forty likewise of

### Moravian Controversy

The conflict between Wesley and Moravianism started not only as a theological problem but also as a practical problem. In the Fetter Lane Society, some Moravian people, especially Philip Molther, taught Quietism which had people stop doing good works, even to pray or to read the Scripture.<sup>157</sup> They got into spiritual confusion. Wesley wrote about this:

The first person I met with there was one [Mrs. Turner] whom I had left strong in faith and zealous of good works. But she now told me, "Mr. Molther had fully convinced her she never had any faith at all; and had advised her, till she received faith, 'to be still,' 'ceasing from outward works,' which she had accordingly done and did not doubt but in a short time she should find the advantage of it."<sup>158</sup>

The problem of stillness was people doubted their own faith and stopped doing good works. So Wesley was against Quietism from a practical aspect. Many people denied their own faith which they had before. However his starting point was a practical pastoral problem, his deep thought led him to theological debates with the Moravians. The main theological issue of Moravian controversy had two topics; one was degrees

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the fifty women that were in band desired to cast in their lot with us." Journal dated on July 23, 1740. BE Works, vol.19, 163.

<sup>157</sup> Philip Molter studied at Jena University. He was influenced by Count Zinzendorf and became Moravian. He stopped at London on his way to Pennsylvania on October eighteenth, 1739. He taught Quietist in Fetter Lane Society. Many people got into spiritual confusion. Many people denied their faith and stopped means of grace because of his teaching.

<sup>158</sup> Journal Dated on Nov.1, 1739. BE Works, vol.19, 119-20.

of faith and the other was a relationship between faith and good works.

First, the Moravians, especially, Molther and Zinzendorf denied degrees of faith, however, Christian David taught about degrees of faith which we already examined. There was not a united teaching about degrees of faith inside the Moravian church. It depended on individual Moravian teachers, Peter Böhler and Christian David recognized degrees of faith, on the other hand, Philip Molther and Count Zinzendorf denied degrees of faith. The reason of denying degrees of faith was that faith is a perfect gift from God. It is incompatible with human fear or doubt. If someone has a little fear of doubt about his own faith, it indicates that one does not have a real faith. In other words, the assurance of faith always comes with saving faith. Wesley taught that it was wrong and it destroyed a person's faith that already was real and did good works. He taught that there are degrees of faith, there is a faith of children, a faith of adult according to the Scripture. So, one has saving faith does not mean that one has an assurance of faith.

Moravians denying degree of faith had another problem. It caused a denying an impartational aspect of sanctification. In conversation with John Wesley, Zinzendorf said that sanctification is "Christ." That is only "imputed, not inherent."<sup>159</sup> He explained sanctification in this way;

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"if it should be changed into gold, is gold the first day, and the second day, and the third: And so it is renewed day by day; but it is never more gold than in the first day."<sup>160</sup> Zinzendorf's understanding of Christian growth was to keep a status as a Christian by renewal grace of God. He did not make any distinction between justification and sanctification or between imputational sanctification and impartational sanctification. On the other hand, Wesley's understanding of sanctification was not only imputational, but also impartational. Wesley's concern for believers was not only a status in front of God, but reality of their hearts. For Wesley, Sanctification meant ontological changing. God renews and cleanses our hearts. It is the reality of our hearts changing into the image of God.

The second problem of Quietism was that it denied the means of grace. Wesley summarized the Moravian position of means of grace in his entry for Sunday, November 4, 1739, "that the ordinances are not means of grace, there being no other means than Christ."<sup>161</sup> For Moravians, Christ is only the means of grace, all human works are invalid for our faith. This indicates the Moravians' understanding of good works. Human good works are incompatible with the works of the Holy Spirit. If we are active for good works, the Holy

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<sup>159</sup> Journal dated on Sept.3, 1741. BE Works, vol.19, 212-15.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>161</sup> Journal dated on November 4, 1739, BE Works, vol.19, 119-21

Spirit cannot work effectively in our hearts. We must be still and wait for the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the Moravian understanding of the means of Grace and good works.

On the other hand, Wesley made a clear distinction between "means of grace" and grace or merit itself. Against the Moravians' definition "Christ is the only means of grace," Wesley said that Christ is "the only meritorious cause of it -- it cannot be gained saved by any who know the grace of God.<sup>162</sup>" The means of grace is not grace itself. Grace is the merit of Christ. Wesley's definition of "means of grace" is this, "I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end -- to be the ordinary channels where by he might convey to men preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace."<sup>163</sup> The means of grace is not God's grace itself. It is a container to convey God's grace. Wesley understood that this grace covered through the means of grace during the whole Christian life from sinner until heaven. It expressed "preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace." Preventing grace gives people an opportunity to be led to Christ. Grace gives saving faith to people. Sanctifying grace transforms people to be suitable for heaven, purifying their hearts and lives. The means of grace goes with the Christian throughout a Christian's life.

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<sup>162</sup> Sermon #16, "The Means of Grace" BE Works, Vol.1, 383.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 383.

A super-Christcentric understanding of theology led Moravians to deny the means of grace. For Moravian people, the identity of a Christian should be in Christ, not in Christians. Believers' identity must be hidden in Christ. So they denied impartational sanctification and the means of grace. On the other hand, Wesley made a distinction between Christ and the identity of believers. So, Christ is the only source of grace, but there are many means to convey this grace by the Holy Spirit. And also, Wesley did not think human good works and the work of the Holy Spirit were incompatible. When we do good works, the Holy Spirit works at the same time. So the means of grace became the real means to convey God's grace by the Holy Spirit. This view of good works became a strong point of the Christian life. Discipleship has meaning and effectiveness in the Wesley's theology. Good works themselves help to establish one's own faith. This practice of good works transforms Christians into real Christians. For this purpose, Wesley made his own discipleship group. This synergetic idea of soteriology is the theological basis for Wesley's discipleship.

Another difference between Wesley and Zinzendorf was their view of salvation. Schmidt said after his examination of the conversation between Wesley and Zinzendorf:

Quite logically Zinzendorf missed in Wesley the difference between law and gospel as the fundamental categories in the relationship of man with God. On the other hand, Wesley felt that Zinzendorf's rejection of the law went beyond Paul's teaching and bordered on Antinomianism, and the practical consequences of indifference to worship and ethics demonstrated this all too clearly to him. Two epochs stood in contrast to

each other: Wesley was the modern thinker, Zinzendorf the man who thought in the categories of the reformation.<sup>164</sup>

Schmidt's observation is quite correct. Zinzendorf could not escape the Lutheran teaching of justification by faith. For him, salvation was justification, no more than that. On the other hand, Wesley thought salvation was the recovery of the image of God. Wesley wrote:

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health of our souls purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>165</sup>

The restoration of the image of God is salvation. For the restoration of the image of God, there is a process of salvation. Here, we realized that Wesley's emphasis was on holiness or sanctification, not on justification. For Wesley, justification is the basis for the holiness. Without justification by faith, we can not start our Christian life. Wesley expressed this as the order of salvation. This order of salvation covers the whole process of salvation. Here, achieving the holiness or restoration of God's image is the center, not an additional part of salvation. If we put the emphasis only on justification by faith, our understanding of the salvation is limited to salvation from sin. But Wesley

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<sup>164</sup> Schmidt, vol.1, 59.

<sup>165</sup> "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I" BE Works, vol.11, 106.

understood salvation in twofold meaning; salvation from sin and recovering the image of God, especially, holiness and love.

There was no way to reconcile Wesley and Zinzendorf theologically. Finally, Wesley and Zinzendorf parted ways. Wesley departed from the Fetter Lane Society. After that Wesley concentrated on his own discipleship movement.

#### Significance of this period

The foundation of Methodist discipleship was finally complete. Based on his own theological perspective, Wesley developed a theology through these controversial arguments with the Moravians. Especially, Wesley established the doctrine of the order of salvation during this period. The arguments with Zinzendorf and Molther clarified to Wesley the logical way of salvation, especially justification by faith as the foundation, and sanctification as central to Christian growth.

The period during 1735-1742 was transitional for Wesley and his discipleship movement. The Moravian movement significantly influenced Wesley and his movement, theologically and practically. Especially, his view of faith and good works, his understanding of justification and sanctification, and his practice of band meetings. He shaped his understanding of discipleship through his encounter with the Moravian people.



## CHAPTER 5

## Wesley's Discipleship Movement.

Wesley as a Pastor

The Methodist discipleship system worked as a pastoral care system. That is the reason Wesley made small groups. There were so many obstacles for the people who converted to and earnestly tried to follow Christ. Obstacles such as these: "Neighbours, strangers, acquaintances, relations, friends, began to cry out again: 'Be not righteous overmuch. Why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Let not much religion make thee mad'." People met severe opposition to their Christian practices. They needed pastoral care to pursue their own salvation. Pastoral concerns were the first purpose of his discipleship. Wesley continued: "We advised them; 'Strengthen you one another. Talk together as often as you can. And pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may 'endure to the end and be saved.'"<sup>166</sup> The reason Wesley recommended that his own people make small groups was not only for theological reasons, but also for more practical and pragmatic reasons. Praying with and encouraging each other was the strategy for winning spiritual warfare until they reached heaven. The small group supported each Christian. Wesley's concern for pastoral care was not only

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<sup>166</sup> "A Plain Account of the Methodist" (1749) BE Works, vol.9, 256

how to convert people from sin, but also how to lead people to be fit for heaven.<sup>167</sup>

Wesley's attitude toward theology was not as a systematic theologian but as a folk theologian. Wesley wrote about his theological perspective after he finished his argument about quietism. He wrote about his attitude toward theology like this: "My soul is sick of this sublime divinity! Let me think and speak as a little child! Let my religion be plain, artless, simple patience, faith and love, be these my highest gifts; and let the highest words wherein I teach them be those I learn from the Book of God!"<sup>168</sup> This writing from his journal shows us that Wesley did not like theological arguments for the purpose of arguments. His theological perspective was not speculative theology or scholarship, but simple and truthful expression with deep insights.

His theological expression was mainly his published sermons and letters. The means of regular communication with his congregation was the main resource of his theology. It reveals to us that Wesley was primarily a pastor more than any other role. He was not a theologian for an academic

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<sup>167</sup> cf. Charles Wesley's Hymn "A charge to keep I have." indicates roles of minister. First verse said that, "A charge to keep I have, A God to glorify, A never dying soul to save, And fit it for the sky." Wesley always emphasized on both present salvation from sin and filling with God's love. These two are strongly connected with each other in Wesley's thought.

<sup>168</sup> Journal dated on Dec.30, 1739. BE Works, vol.19, 131.

specialization, but for "praxis" theology which people can live and do according to his theology.

Wesley considered himself the pastor of all Methodists, who numbered nearly 75,000 at his death. In his sermon "On Obedience to Pastors," Wesley portrayed himself as a pastor of entire Methodism: "I would now apply myself in a more particular manner to you who desire me to watch over your souls. Do you make it a point of conscience to obey me ,for my Master's sake?"<sup>169</sup> Here he describes himself as a pastor who watched over his congregations. He was a cautious, thoughtful, and creative pastor for the Methodists. He always showed concern for his societies and members. He examined his members frequently. Wesley's main concern for his congregation was to help people to ultimate salvation. He tried every effort to attain this end and used every means which he knew. So, Wesley's pastoral care had many aspects, broad concerns, and complicated systems. To achieving the ultimate salvation of Methodist members, Wesley used his discipleship as a pastoral care system. His discipleship was experienced and proven by himself before he started the Methodist Society which we have already seen. Wesley continued to revise his own discipleship system after the separation from the Fetter Lane Society. The appearances and practices of his discipleship changed, however, the basic idea of discipleship did not change. During his pastoral

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<sup>169</sup> BE Works, vol.3, 381.

care practices, Wesley had met problems against his discipleship. He defended and redefined his idea of discipleship.

### Wesley's view of the law of God

Concerning the idea of discipleship, Wesley met serious opposition against Christian good works and obedience to the law of God, first from the Moravian people, and then from his own followers. Wesley called these people Antinomians. They thought Christians are free from all kinds of law. For them there were no limitations for Christian life. We have already seen Moravian Quietism as one of Antinomianism. Wesley realized that this Antinomianism undercut his discipleship. He wrote sermons and pamphlets for this disputation, "Address to Antinomian", "The Original, Nature Design, Properties, and Use of Law", "The Law Established by Faith." Law given by God had two dimensions: ceremonial law and moral law. Antinomians denied both ceremonial law and moral law. On the other hand, Wesley revealed that Christians are free from ceremonial law, but not from moral law. Moral law is essential for Christian life. This is the norm of Christian life.

In Wesley's mind, moral law was Christological. The end of Christ's coming was not to destroy the law, but to establish the law. The purpose of the law is to bring people to Christ and to keep them alive in Him. The law helps Christians "to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord

Jesus Christ."<sup>170</sup> Both Christ and the law are strongly related with each other. The law reveals our need for Christ's redemption. And to follow Christ, we need more and more to 'look unto Jesus,' and more and more we need to look into 'the perfect law, the law of liberty.'<sup>171</sup> The law instructs the life of Christians on what is the right way for the followers of Christ. This moral law was not only written in the Scripture, but also written on the believers' heart by the Spirit of Christ. In this manner, Wesley's understanding of the law is strongly Christological.

The origin of the law was strongly connected with the nature of God. The relationship between the origin of the law and the nature of God was God's holiness, purity and goodness. Wesley emphasized that the cause of the law was God's love. Wesley connected the law and the idea of God as loving Father.<sup>172</sup> The law was given through His love to the children of God upon the earth. This combination of law and

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<sup>170</sup> "Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law" BE Works, vol.2, 19.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>172</sup> Wesley wrote; "Was it not mere love that moved him to publish his law, after the understandings of men were darkened? And to send his prophets to declare that law to the blind, thoughtless children of men? ... It was his love which explained these living oracles by David and all the prophets that followed; until, when the fullness of time was come, he sent his only-begotten Son, 'not to destroy the law, but to fulfill', to confirm every jot and tittle thereof, till having wrote it in the hearts of all his children, and put all his enemies under his feet, 'he shall deliver up' his mediatorial 'kingdom to the Father', 'that God may be all in all'." Sermon #34 "Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law" BE Works, vol.2, 14.

the idea of God indicated that Law was not merely for condemnation but also for instruction for Christians.

When Antinomianism declared that they were free from all laws of God, Wesley said they confused sin and law. They blasphemously thought that 'the law of God is either sin itself or the cause of sin.' This is not true. The Nature of the Law is 'holy, and just, and good.' It is based on the goodness of God. It comes from the love of God. The use of the law is not limited 'to convince the world of sin.' Wesley strongly pointed out that the use of the law is also 'to keep us alive.' The law of God is 'the grand means whereby the blessed Spirit prepares the believer for larger communication of the life of God.'<sup>173</sup> This understanding of the law for the Christian life was totally different from Antinomianism. They thought that Christians were free from the law of God. It is not true. Wesley pointed out that Christians are free "from the power of sin, from serving the devil, from offending God. ... This is perfect freedom."<sup>174</sup> Wesley's distinction between freedom from sin and from the law is a distinctive point which differs from Antinomians.

#### Structure of Discipleship

Wesley's pastoral care had so many dimensions. He used many means of pastoral care. His organization of societies, class meetings, bands, and selecte society, his preaching,

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 19.

love feasts, tickets for society, his publications, his private letters, and published letters, all these, Wesley used for his pastoral care. He did almost everything for his pastoral care.

In this section, the writer limits his study to Wesley's small group system as his pastoral care system. Since his small group system was central activities in the Methodist movement, an examination of Wesley's small group system will reveals the nature of Wesley's discipleship.

#### Membership of the Methodists

The Methodist Society was a voluntary discipleship group just like any other discipleship group. The distinctive point of the Methodist Society was its open membership. Forerunners of the Methodist society, such as Moravian, Pietism, and Religious Societies in England, were required at least the their own churchmanship. Membership of these discipleship movements were for the few spiritual elites like the Oxford Methodists. These memberships were limited. Compared with these discipleship groups, the Methodist movement had an open membership. The requirement for joining the Methodist Society was 'the desire to escape from the wrath of God coming.' The requirement for membership never changed. This requirement opened the door to everyone who desired their own salvation. Wesley did not limit the Methodist membership to Anglican people. There were Moravians, Anglicans, Catholics, and Puritans in the

Methodist societies.<sup>175</sup> This membership and outdoor preaching gave great evangelical success to the Methodist movement.

However, the membership of the Methodist Society had a feature of openness to everybody: it was difficult to maintain this membership. Wesley examined his societies frequently. If he found a disorderly member, after his advice and warning, he cut off their membership if they did not agree with him. Wesley invented the class ticket for checking membership of the society. Wesley provided tickets for the Societies on February 24, 1741.<sup>176</sup> This ticket was provided for certain members to acknowledge proper membership. "These also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any disorderly member."<sup>177</sup> Wesley recognized that the seriousness of seekers and believers for seeking salvation was necessary to be a member of Methodism. If someone who was not serious in seeking

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<sup>175</sup> Fujimoto, 58.

<sup>176</sup> Wesley wrote: "The bands meeting at Bristol, I read over the names of the United Society, being determined that no disorderly walker should remain therein. Accordingly I took an account of every person (1) to whom any reasonable objection was made; (2) who was not known to and recommended by some on whose veracity I could depend. To those who were sufficiently recommended, tickets were given on the following days. Most of the rest I had face to face with their accusers, and such as either appeared to be innocent or confessed their faults and promised a better behaviour were then received into the society. The others were put upon trial again, unless they voluntarily expelled themselves. About forty were by this means separated from us; I trust, only for a season." Journal dated on February 24, 1741. BE Works, vol.19. 183.

<sup>177</sup> The Works of John Wesley, vol.8, 256-57.



their own salvation was in the Methodist Society, he would be a bad influence on or give them worldly thoughts. Wesley was aware of the danger of backsliding or recession of Methodist members. This membership was sometimes too strict for some members. After examining his members, Wesley cut off members from his society without hesitation.

This strict membership had a danger of spiritual elitism, or pride. This might have been a dangerous temptation for Methodist members. Wesley was always aware of this danger. He repeatedly wrote to his preachers to be patient and tolerant with their members.

The membership of the Methodist Society indicated Wesley's Arminian understanding of free grace and human will. His openness toward everyone was an optimistic view of grace. There was no shadow of predestination for the membership of Methodist societies. Wesley realized that the doctrine of predestination robbed the idea of God's free grace and human free will. God's grace was given to everyone freely. Grace makes it possible for everyone to respond to the gospel. As a response to God's grace, the membership of the Methodist Society was also open to everyone. God's grace was provided to everybody, so everyone had an opportunity to join Methodism for working out their own salvation.

On the other hand, strictness of personal commitment for personal salvation was required. Wesley recognized human free will as important for discipleship. There was an Arminian limitation for attaining salvation. This Arminian

limitation is that God gives us free grace. As long as we use God's grace for our salvation, we can work out our own salvation. But if we stop receiving and using God's grace, our progress also stops. People cannot do anything about others' salvation. Our salvation is based on our own wills. It is a personal matter. There is a limit to our salvation. Wesley realized this limitation. As far as a person continued to have as his first desire to escape from the coming of God's wrath and to attain his own salvation, he would have a membership. If he did not, people could not do anything about his own salvation. So Wesley cut the membership of the Methodist Society to guard against people who still had their desire to pursue their own salvation. Davies pointed out that the membership of the Methodist society was Wesley's unique contribution in Church history.<sup>178</sup> Wesley combined depth of personal commitment with openness of welcome, based on his understanding of Arminian theology.

#### Methodist Society.

Wesley's Methodist Society was strongly connected with his open air preaching. He wrote about the beginning of the Society in this way:

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to

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<sup>178</sup> Rupert E. Davies, "Introduction" BE Works, vol.9, 25.

come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening.<sup>179</sup>

This society in London was apparently different from the Fetter Lane Society. The writing indicates to us that the beginning of this society was deeply connected to his pastoral care. This incident was probably related to his open air preaching. Usually, Wesley concluded his preaching with an invitation to meet him after words. Probably after Wesley's preaching, these people came to him and asked to meet him. His activities with these people were prayer and advice. Wesley indicated the way of salvation, prayed with them and gave advice of how to achieve this goal. Pastoral care was a primary concern for the beginning of the Society. As a pastoral care system, Society movements spread throughout London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne and anywhere in England.

Another feature of the Methodists' Society was "with each other." Wesley wrote about this feature in this way: "Such a Society is no other than 'a company of men "having the form, and seeking the power of godliness", united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies" (1743) BE Works, vol.9, 69.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 69.

The society meeting worked as the largest unit of discipleship in the Methodist movement. The Society meeting in early Methodism provided the occasion and means for cohesion and unity in local societies. Christian fellowship for achieving holiness of heart and life was a feature of the Methodist society. The means of this Society was prayer, receiving the word, and contorting and encouraging each other. The key phrase was 'to work out their salvation.' Being a Christian was not a lonely existence, but one needs a company of believers around him. This company made a small church inside a big church. Apparently the idea of ecclesiolae in ecclesia was the basis of the Methodist discipleship meetings.

Wesley was accused of destroying the Christian fellowship inside the Church of England. He answered this accusation. There was no true Christian fellowship before the Methodists. So how could the Methodists have destroyed Christian fellowship? Wesley realized and was confident that the Methodists were the agents from God who called people to the real Christianity and real Christian fellowship.<sup>181</sup>

As the largest discipleship division, the Society had many aspects and activities in nature. The Love feast was a distinctive meeting as a Christian fellowship. This particular type of meeting was originally from the Moravian Church. They had a Love Feast meeting at Herrnhut in

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<sup>181</sup> Outler, John Wesley, 20. originally from "A Preservation Against Unsettled Notions in Religion" (1758)

Germany. This meeting was famous as the beginning of the Moravian Church in 1727. Wesley adapted this service from the Moravian Church. The other reason Wesley adapted this meeting was the early Church's practice of the agape meal. It started as an occasional service in the bands. Soon after, the Love Feast became a monthly service open to the whole society.<sup>182</sup> The meeting was a good example of a Christian fellowship in the Methodist society.<sup>183</sup>

Another distinctive meeting of societies was the Watch-Night Service. Wesley recorded the origin of this service in his "Plain Account of the People Called Methodists."<sup>184</sup> Persons in Kingswood frequently met together and spent a great part of the night in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Wesley recognized that this practice followed the practice of a prayer vigil in the early Church.<sup>185</sup> He preached for the watch-night service and after the preaching, people continued singing, praying, and praising God until a little beyond midnight. This service gave special blessings to the people. This service became a special New Year's Eve tradition.

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<sup>182</sup> Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology Kingswood Books (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 210.

<sup>183</sup> Note Wesley's description of the love-feast for free and familiar conversation in Journal (19 July, 1761), BE Works, vol.21, 336.

<sup>184</sup> "Plain Account of the Methodists," BE Works, vol.9, III 1, 264.

<sup>185</sup> Ted A. Campbell, John Wesley and Christian Antiquity (Nashville: Kingswood Book, 1991), 98.

Maddox gave evidence for this fact from Wesley's Hymns selected for this service.<sup>186</sup> The feature of this meeting was its longer time than any other society meetings. This intensive time of prayer and praise to God was much more of a blessing for Methodist people.

The Covenant renewal meeting was also a distinctive meeting. This particular meeting influenced Puritan Covenant theology with which Wesley was already familiar. On August 6, 1755, Wesley mentioned the covenant service. This is 'a means of increasing serious religion.'<sup>187</sup> Wesley recognized that the covenant in front of God made for great spiritual renewal and progress for Methodist people. The covenant helps people to dedicate their heart and life to the service for God. It involves their wills for their strong commitment. This covenant service was directly based on the Puritan, Richard Alleine, and his book, Vindiciae Pietas. Wesley abridged this book and published it in the Christian Library. In the Covenant renewal service, Wesley recited 'the tenor of the covenant' from Alleine's book. Later this covenant renewal service became a New Year's Day tradition. Maddox examined three purposes for the covenant renewal meeting: "(1) recurrent recognition and confession of our failures to live responsibly within our restored relationship to God, (2) an affirmation of God's faithfulness

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<sup>186</sup> Maddox, 210.

<sup>187</sup> "Short History of People Called Methodists," BE Works, vol.9, 461.

and forgiveness, and (3) the renewal of our commitment, based on God's gracious empowering."<sup>188</sup> This practice of covenant renewal service reconfirmed their commitment to God and renewal of a daily life of discipleship.

To these activities he added regular every week meetings. However, the problem of the Society soon merged. The number of Methodist members increased rapidly. This was increased by the number of local society members. The large number of members in a local society made the mutual aspect of the Society which was the primary purpose of its existence, impossible. To solve this problem, Wesley made subdivision meetings: band meetings, class meetings and selecte society.

#### Band Meeting

The first subdivisional discipleship group under the Society was the band. This particular meeting followed the Moravian practice when the Fetter Lane Society started. This particular meeting was divided into five to ten people according to sex, age and social marital status. Wesley adopted the Moravian band system for the Methodist movement, as we already saw. He dropped the Moravian monitor system.

The primary purpose of the Band Society was confession with each other. Wesley set a rule for the Band on December 25th, in 1738. The Scriptural basis for the practice of the Band Society was James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to

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<sup>188</sup> Maddox, 210-211.

another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed." This mutual relationship was crucial for the band system. Wesley wrote "to speak, each of us in order, freely and plainly the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and temptation we have felt since our last meeting."<sup>189</sup> Confession was not an easy matter for people. If there was no trustworthy relationship within the Band, there would be no possibility of this mutual confession. Without the love of God, there could be no success for this practice. Martin Schmidt observed that "the bands were based upon the closest personal unity of their members, a unity derived from an awareness of the life of God hidden in them."<sup>190</sup> This awareness of God's love inside believers was crucial for the Band meetings. This awareness made possible mutual confession. For keeping this trust-relationship, Wesley wrote about the way of speaking in the Band as 'orderly, freely, and plainly.'

The conduct of the Band meeting was indicated in rule 6: "To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest in order as many and as searching questions as may be concerning their state, sins, and temptations."<sup>191</sup> This conduct was not based on the Moravian tradition of the monitor system but on mutual confession.

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<sup>189</sup> "Rules of the Band Societies" BE Works, vol.9, 77.

<sup>190</sup> Schmidt, vol.1, 231.

<sup>191</sup> "Rules of the Band Societies" BE Works, vol.9, 77.



The questions for membership indicate that Wesley limited, and was more strict about, the membership for the band Society than for the membership of united society meetings.

1. Have you the forgiveness of sins?
2. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's with your Spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you? <sup>192</sup>

The requirement for joining the Band was the assurance of faith. Experiencing forgiveness of sin, peace with God, having the love of God and conquering sin, were central issues for joining bands. Probably, these requirements reflected the Moravian understanding of faith. But not only Moravian influence, the nature of the Band itself required high spiritual commitment.

As a mutual confessional group, people needed to be regenerated at least. Without the experience of repentance, forgiveness of sin and regeneration of heart, people could not confess their faults and sin, because of self-guardedness. The band meeting was the place to experience healing from their faults and sin, rather than accusing and judging. Only confession of their faults and sins led to the experience of God's love, forgiveness, and Christian fellowship. So, the band meeting was not suitable for

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

seekers. It was for believers to pursue their own holiness through these meetings.

The Second part of the questions was about the desire for mutual confession: openness of heart, sincerity, and seriousness for mutual confession. Wesley recommended the candidate and member of bands to examine their own desire for mutual confession.

6. Do you desire to be told of your fault?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you from time to time whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, without reserve? 193

These questions examine the motivation toward attending band meetings. This motivation was the most important for attendance of this meeting. Their motivation would decide what kind of meeting would occur and how the meeting will be conducted. Their motivation must be derived from God's love. This motivation was strongly connected to their humiliation. Humiliation before people and God were required. Pride produces vanity and disguise. Pride and self-elevation prevent mutual confession of sin and faults. Pride should be eliminated in front of people and God. Honesty must control

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193 Ibid., 78.

the atmosphere of band meetings. Practical and pastoral concerns about mutual confession dominated these membership requirements. The requirement for the Band Society was much more strict and more serious for members than Society.

In a band meeting, Wesley recommended these questions to ask:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How was you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

The examination of sin committed, temptation, and deliverance from it, gave people a better understanding of their moral weakness and solutions for these problems. This was a practical way of spiritual growth.

Question Four indicates to us that this particular meeting was not only for personal spiritual growth, but also for shaping moral judgment within the Christian fellowship. It shows they could discuss ambiguous moral problems whether sin or not. This shaping of moral judgments produced thinking Christians who pursued their own holiness. This intellectual struggle with practical issues shaped more sensitivity for moral issues and a seriousness toward holiness. The importance of this question is that this discussion makes people go beyond legalism. The pursuit of holiness was not mere simple legalism, but involved intellectual moral judgment and living an actual life in the presence of God.

In the Rules of the Band Society in 1738, there was no mention of good works and means of grace for particular Methodist character, because these rules were the first Band rules for Methodist society. At that point, Wesley had a close relationship with the Moravians. The rules of the band were still under the strong influence of the Moravian Church. In later years, Wesley gave "Directions" to his band societies.<sup>194</sup> Wesley gave the same accounts for the band societies as well as the united societies; to abstain from doing evil, to maintain good works, and to attend to all the ordinances of God. Based on the regular discipleship practices of the Societies, the band meeting built up further progress for the pursuit of holiness.

The difficulty of the band meetings is indicated by the number of members at these particular meetings. The number of Bands were limited in the Methodist societies. Dean pointed out, "The most of solid conclusion that we can draw is that never more than one-fourth of the Methodist membership was in a band at any given time. By the end of the eighteenth century the proportion was probably not more than one in ten."<sup>195</sup> Compared with the class meetings, the number of the bands was much fewer. That indicated this discipleship group had more strictness and spiritual difficulty. Wesley himself regarded the Band meetings as

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<sup>194</sup> "Directions given to the Band Societies" (Dec.25, 1744). BE Works, vol.9, 79.

<sup>195</sup> Dean, 164.

useful and necessary for the pursuit of holiness. Wesley wrote to the Bristol Society about necessity of the Bands.

Let all of you who have faith meet in band without excuse and without delay. There has been a shameful neglect of this. Remove this scandal. As soon as the Assistant has fixed your band make it a point of conscience never to miss without an absolute necessity; and the preacher's meeting you all together one night out of two will be an additional blessings.<sup>196</sup>

Band meeting had an important role as mutual confessional meeting in Wesley pastoral care system.

### Class meetings

The societies and the band existed from the beginning of the Methodist movement. The class meeting started in 1742 according to Captain Foy's suggestion. Wesley and the societies accepted this suggestion and made classes inside the Methodists societies. The societies were too large for mutual discipleship. On the other hand, the Bands had several requirements. There was a small percentage of all the members who joined the bands. The class meeting emerged in that kind situation. The class meeting filled a gap between the societies and bands. The class meeting became a disciplinary unit of the society.<sup>197</sup> In Wesley's eyes this was the keystone of the entire Methodist edifice.

Wesley recorded the origin of the class meeting in this way:

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<sup>196</sup> "John Wesley to the Bristol Societies, October, 1764," The Letters of John Wesley, vol.4, 172-73.

<sup>197</sup> A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart, (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 191.

Many met together to consult on a proper method for discharging the public debt; and it was at length agreed, (1) the every member of the society who was able should contribute a penny a week; (2) that the whole society should be divided into little companies or classes -- about twelve in each class; and (3) that one person in each class should receive the contribution of the rest, and bring it to the stewards, weekly.<sup>198</sup>

This class system changed the whole scheme of Methodist discipleship. There were problems inside Methodist Societies because of their rapidly increasing numbers. The problem of the Society was not only too many members to give suitable pastoral care for each of the Societies, but also there were some people who grew cold and gave way to sins and some who were spiritually dangerous to others in Societies. Wesley was looking for a remedy for this spiritual sickness inside his societies. According to Captain Foy's suggestion, Wesley divided the Bristol Society into smaller groups and gave responsibility for taking care of people to class leaders. Eventually, this final solution for Bristol Society became the real solution for the Society system itself. Wesley realized the usefulness of a class meeting for discipleship. He wrote, "In a while some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately. 'This is the thing, the very thing we have wanted so long.'"<sup>199</sup> This class meeting system spread throughout the Methodists' societies.

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<sup>198</sup> "Journal dated on February 15, 1742" BE Works, vol.19, 251.

<sup>199</sup> "Plain Account of the Methodists" BE Works, vol.9, 261.

The Societies themselves existed as Christian fellowship group at large. However, the actual Christian fellowship for Methodist discipleship shifted from the Society meeting to the class meetings. Until the class system was organized, actual pastoral care was impossible in Methodist societies. Now Wesley had a effective pastoral care system for his own societies. Through the class system, Wesley could reach the bottom members of his own Societies. Especially mutual fellowship among Methodists was fulfilled by the class meetings. This class meeting became the point of entry into the Methodist societies.<sup>200</sup>

Any person determined to save his soul may be united (this is the only condition required) with them. But this desire must be evidenced by three marks: avoiding all known sin, doing good after his power, and attending all the ordinances of God. He is then placed in such a class as is convenient for him, where he spends about an hour in a week. And the next quarter, if nothing is objected to him, he is admitted into The Society. And therein he may continue as long as he continues to meet his brethren and walk according to his profession.<sup>201</sup>

The place inside the Methodist society for a newcomer was a class meeting during a trial period. A new member was examined in a class meeting for a quarter to see whether he followed the rules of the united societies. Then he was decided to join the Methodist society.

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<sup>200</sup> Henry H. Knight III, The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press., 1992), 98.

<sup>201</sup> Sermon #107 "On God's Vineyard" BE Works, vol.3, 511-512.

Instead of large Methodist societies, the class meeting became the actual mutual Christian fellowship in the Methodist societies. Wesley expressed in the class meeting that "many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before."<sup>202</sup> The class members began to bear their burdens one another and to take care of each other. The class members had an intimate acquaintance, they had a more endeared affection for each other.<sup>203</sup> Band meetings were confessional, mutual fellowships. On the other hand, class meetings were more accountable meetings. They made a class meeting as a company like minded fellowship to the pursuit of holiness. Watson wrote in practice of accountability of class meetings: "Class leaders were required to keep a record of attendance on a special class paper or later in a class book."<sup>204</sup> class leaders measured the accountability of class members according to their behavioral conduct. This was based on Wesley's conviction that faith should be indicated by good works. Class leaders measured their members' spiritual condition from behavioral conduct and mutual Christian fellowship. This was the essence of Wesley's pastoral care for the Methodists.

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<sup>202</sup> "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" BE Works, vol.9, 262.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>204</sup> David Lowes Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1988), 107.



The significance of the class meeting was as a sub-pastoral care group under lay-leaders. In particular, the most important figure inside a class meeting was a class leader. A characteristic point of the class meeting system was that class leaders had a significant pastoral responsibility for their class members.

To see each person in his class once a week at the least; in order  
 To inquire how their souls prosper;  
 To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require.  
 To receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor.<sup>205</sup>

So, Wesley was especially concerned for the class leaders. Wesley was open to those who complained against the class leaders. But basically Wesley believed that class leaders did a good job of pastoral care in their class meeting.<sup>206</sup> Another aspect of a class leader was a helper for ministers. He would report the conditions of his class

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<sup>205</sup> "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" BE Works, vol.9, 261.

<sup>206</sup> Wesley wrote; "They spoke far more plausibly than these who said, 'The thing is well enough itself. But the leaders are insufficient for the work. They have neither gifts nor grace for such an employment.' I answer, (1) Yet such leaders as they are, it is plain God has blessed their labour. (2) If any of these is remarkably wanting in gifts or grace he is soon taken notice of and removed. (3) If you know any such, tell it to me, not to others, and I will endeavour to exchange him for a better. (4) It may be hoped, they will all be better than they are, both by experience and observation, and by the advices given them by the minister every Tuesday night, and the prayer offered up for them."  
 "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" BE Works, vol.9, 263-64.

members, especially sick and disorderly member.<sup>207</sup> Class leaders worked as a pastoral giver and a helper in the larger Methodists pastoral care system. The class meetings were a basic unit for pastoral care in the Methodist societies.

#### Select Society

This particular small group was for spiritual elites, not for ordinary Christians. A member of this group was one "who thus continued in the light of God 's countenance, which the rest of their brethren did not want, and probably could not receive."<sup>208</sup> Wesley had hand-picked from among the most faithful Methodists. The background of this particular discipleship group was the holiness revivals inside Methodist movements. Many people claimed to experience Christian Perfection. Wesley's concern for those was to let them maintain in this perfection.<sup>209</sup> For this purpose, the select Society was formed.

My design was, not only to direct them now to press after perfection; to exercise their every grace, and

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<sup>207</sup> The job of a class leader was "to meet the Minister and the stewards of the Society in order: To inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that are disorderly and will not be reprov'd. To pay to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding."

"A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" BE Works, vol.9, 261.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>209</sup> Wesley wrote about his attitude toward people who claimed Christian Perfection. " If a man says, 'I now feel nothing but love,' and I know him to be an honest man, I believe him. What then should I 'stay to see'? not whether he has such a blessing, but whether he will keep it." "Journal dated on June 6, 1763" BE Works, vol.21, 415.

improve every talent they had received; and to incite them to love one another more, and to watch more carefully over each other; but also to have a select company to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve, and whom I could propose to all their brethren as pattern of love, of holiness, and of all good works.<sup>210</sup>

These members of select society were not only participants in this group, but also models for other brethren in Methodism.

That means this particular society was for leaders of the Methodists movement.

This select Society was form in London on Dec.25, 1743.<sup>211</sup>

This small group movement grew up going with Methodists Revival.

Wesley wrote a description of select society in "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists"

VIII. 1. Many of these soon recovered the ground they had lost. Yea, they rose higher than before, being more watchful then ever, and more meek and lowly, as well as stronger in faith that worketh by love. They now outran the greater part of their brethren, continually walking in the light of God, and having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>212</sup>

Members of this small group had to be meek and lowly, as well as strong in faith. The spiritual elitism was denied by Wesley. Humility was necessary for this group. On the other hand, higher spiritual experience was also required for this small group. This membership was so difficult to practice,

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<sup>210</sup> BE Works, vol.9, 270.

<sup>211</sup> see reference no.86 in BE Works, vol.9, 270.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 269.

however, the only God's grace made it possible to follow this requirement.

Compared with other Methodist discipleship groups which had a list of rules for each group, the select society had very few. "They had no need of being encumbered with many rules, having the best rule of all in their hearts. No particular directions were therefore given to them."<sup>213</sup> The realization of Christian Perfection was the basis of this group. If each member was filled with God's love, there was no need for many rules. That was not Antinomianism. The difference between select society and Antinomianism was this; Antinomianism broke God's commandment, on the other hand, the select society had a realization of God's love and kept all commandments of God. Love fulfills the law of God. Here we can see a good example of Wesley's understanding of the relationship between law and love.

The atmosphere of this small group was so important that Wesley gave directions specifically.

Everyone here has an equal liberty of speaking, there being none greater or less than another. I could say freely to these, when they were met together, 'Ye may all prophesy one by one' (taking that word in its lower sense), 'that all learn and all may be comforted.' And I often found the advantage of such a free conversation, and that 'in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.' And who is inclined so to do is likewise encouraged to pour out his soul to God. And here especially we have found that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 270.

This equal liberty of speech was the key for the atmosphere in the select society. Henderson pointed out that this company-like atmosphere was not only for lay participants but also for Wesley who needed a "home base" for his Methodists activities.<sup>215</sup> Wesley himself wrote about his experience at the select Society in his Journal; "the select society met; such a company of lively believers, full of faith and love, as I never found in this country before."<sup>216</sup> "I met the select society, consisting of sixty-five members. I believe all of these members were saved from sin; most of them are still in glorious liberty. Many of them spake with admirable simplicity. And their words were like fire. Immediately the flame kindled and spread from heart to hearts."<sup>217</sup>

These descriptions indicate that Wesley really enjoyed his presence in this select Society. There was a spiritual excitement in the select society. Methodists progressed into holiness vividly. Wesley himself excited about this spiritual activities. This was the top discipleship group in the Methodist movements.

There were not only good things happened in this small group, but also problems occurred in the select society. Since the spiritual level of this select society was so high, it was difficult to maintain their spiritual levels and

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<sup>215</sup> Henderson, 183.

<sup>216</sup> Journal dated on August 7, 1768. BE Works, vol.22, 157.

<sup>217</sup> "Journal dated on June 17, 1770" Ibid., 234.

therefore to keep the select society itself. Wesley also reported that the select society was in decline. "I was surprised to find that the select society had been wholly neglected. I got a few of them together but did not find so much as one who had not 'given up his confidence'." <sup>218</sup>

Even the highest spiritual people could move back spiritually. They pursued holiness of heart and life. They practiced particular small groups for pressing after perfection. This indicates how difficult it is to maintain our spirituality at a high level. There is always the possibility and danger of moving back. Methodists supported each other in their small groups. They even practiced discipleship small group continuously, however, they sometimes failed to maintain this discipleship group. Without these small supporting systems, it is more difficult to maintain our spirituality high. The purpose of select society was to maintain one's Christian perfection.

#### Penitent Bands

The last discipleship group was named penitent band. This particular name indicates the nature of this discipleship group. Penitent bands were designed especially for backsliders. Henderson called this group as "The Rehabilitative Mode."<sup>219</sup> The membership of penitent bands was one who had failed to live according to the Methodists' rules, but one still had a desire to overcome their personal

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<sup>218</sup> "Journal dated on August 27, 1770" Ibid., 244-45.

<sup>219</sup> Henderson, 184.

problems. Wesley wrote about their problems.

And yet while most of these who were thus intimately joined together went on daily from faith to faith, some fell from the faith, either all at once, by falling into known, wilful sin, or gradually and almost insensibly, by giving way in what they called little things -- by sins of omission, by yielding to heart sins, or by not watching unto prayer.<sup>220</sup>

Problems depended on individuals. However, Wesley pointed out two types of sins; one was positive sin or wilful sins, and the other was negative sin or sins of omissions. Wesley was always aware of any types of sins. Even negligence was counted as a sin.

Compared with his strict understanding of sins, penitent bands reveals us that Wesley was not mere strict and legalistic person. He always opened a door of Methodists society to whom desired salvation sincerely. He gave an opportunity to backsliders. This came from Wesley's pastoral concern. It reveals Wesley's heart as a pastor, who desired everyone's salvation. The reason Wesley worked this way was based on his understanding of God as a shepherd. Wesley wrote, "We endeavoured to bring them back to the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls."<sup>221</sup> In Wesley's mind, the Lord was Shepherd who looks for His lost sheep.<sup>222</sup> Wesley did not only made a particular small groups for backsliders, but also he published a sermon which aimed at

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<sup>220</sup> BE Works, vol.9, 268-69.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., vol.9, 269.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Luke 15:4, 1 Pet. 2:25.

them specifically.<sup>223</sup> Wesley's pastoral care system covered every stage of believers, including backsliders.

The practices of penitence band was described this way:

At this hour all the hymns, exhortations, and prayers are adapted to their circumstances; being wholly suited to those who did see God, but have now lost the light of his countenance; and who mourn after him, and refuse to be comforted till they know he has healed all their backsliding.<sup>224</sup>

The meetings of penitence band was adapted to their circumstances. In other words, penitence band was problem oriented small groups. Henderson pointed out that one of their problems was alcoholism.<sup>225</sup> The real practices in penitence bands largely were lost. The significance of penitence bands was that Wesley's small groups covers even backsliders. Methodists movement was not spiritual elitism, but it was a pastoral care system under the Church of England.

Wesley used his own discipleship organizations as pastoral care system. Through these organizations--the Societies, the band meeting, class meetings, select society, and penitence bands--Wesley provided Pastoral care to the people. In these small groups, class meeting was the center of Methodists discipleship movement. The purpose of Wesley's pastoral care was to achieve their own salvation. So, Wesley worked his own discipleship movement throughout his life.

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<sup>223</sup> Sermon #86 "A Call to Backsliders" BE Works, vol.3, 210-16.

<sup>224</sup> BE Works, vol.9, 269.

<sup>225</sup> Henderson, 185.



## CHAPTER 6

## Conclusion

Wesley's understanding of discipleship was not made instantaneously, but it was built up throughout his life. It drew from many historical and theological heritage during its formational process. Wesley accepted influences from Puritanism, Roman Catholicism, Moravianism, Pietism, and Anglicanism. Wesley's discipleship itself reveals Wesley's characteristics "Via Media." Wood articulates Wesley's character of Via Media in this way:

We must not overestimate the originality of Wesley, nor misconstrue the exact nature of his gifts. He was not so much an innovator as adapter. He knew how to suit a plan to the occasion. He improvised measures as the need arose. .... We should be wrong to regard him as a calculated copyist. Rather he was guided by the Spirit to shape an instrument to meet the exigencies of the situation with which he was faced.<sup>226</sup>

His theological and practical heritage was not Wesley's discipleship weakness but it became his original strength. He kept a balance between many tensions: knowledge and trust in Christ, God's free grace and human good works, God's sovereign and human free will, justification and sanctification, inward holiness and outward conducts, and theology and practice. His discipleship was a fusion of theology and practice. Both were needed in Wesley's discipleship. His discipleship was the bridge between theology and practice.

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<sup>226</sup> Wood, 189.

Wesley formulated his idea of discipleship through his life. First, Wesley formulated his theological background through his parents. Then, he encountered Jeremy Taylor, William Law, Moravians, and Calvinists. Wesley sometimes accepted their theology and practices, and he sometimes refused their theology and practices through theological arguments and judgments. His inquiry to his own salvation made a big step at the Aldersgate meeting on May 24, 1738. However, his inquiry to his ultimate salvation did not finish until his death. As well as his inquiry own salvation, he inquired other's salvation as a minister. That is the cornerstone to understanding Wesley's discipleship.

From this understanding of Wesley, Wesley is to be understood as a minister. He was neither a mere theologian for theology, nor a mere evangelist for evangelism, nor discipleship leader for discipleship. Wesley was a minister who worked as a theologian, an evangelist, a discipleship leader, an organizer, and a pastor. His main concern was how to lead people to heaven. To accomplish this end, Wesley developed his own view of discipleship.

So, Wesley's practices of discipleship were strongly connected with his soteriology. The whole scheme of discipleship was aimed to the ultimate salvation, preparing for standing in front of God at the final judgment. However, the end of salvation was glorification and final judgment, until those one must pass through Christian life in this world. Wesley understood our human nature is against God's

will. Our environments are also against God's will, because of our sins. The necessity of Christian discipleship came from this understanding of sin and world. In this context, a sinner could become a saint by the grace of God. Wesley emphasized synergetic aspect of Christian life.

The most important for Wesley was not only positional change in front of God, which is justification by faith or positional sanctification, but also heart reality. "Without holiness, no one can see God." This understanding of holiness was the reality of the believer's heart. To this end, he developed his own discipleship as his pastoral care system. Pastoral care means for Wesley that Christian people could work through their own holiness of heart and life. The whole scheme of Wesley's theology and practices aimed at this point.

Wesley realized that Christian discipline is the center of Christian practices. Wesley himself expressed the importance of Christian discipleship: "It was a common saying among the Christians in the primitive church, 'The soul and body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian' -- implying that none could be real Christians without help of Christian discipline."<sup>227</sup> Thus Wesley set Christian discipline as the center of his pastoral care. Now is the time for us to recognize Christian discipline as the central issue of Christianity.

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<sup>227</sup> Sermon #122 "Cause of the Inefficacy of Christianity" BE Works, vol.4, 90.

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